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RECOLLECTIONS OF  
A DEFECTIVE MEMORY





THE AUTHOR

# RECOLLECTIONS OF A DEFECTIVE MEMORY

*By*  
FRED KERR



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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS

THE first title that suggested itself to me for this book was "Reminiscences." But looking at the word as it appeared when written, I was afraid that people would think I could not spell, and that I was supplying my critics—if any—with too obvious a way out. So I, somewhat regretfully, rejected that title, and have fallen back on a confession—"Recollections of a Defective Memory."

Indeed, that title expresses these pages very faithfully; for I have no notes, few newspaper cuttings or photographs, nor can I refer to letters, for I have kept very few. My only reason for setting down these recollections is the feeling that an actor's life may possibly have some interest for others—for an actor's life is not as other men's lives. He goes through strange vicissitudes, meets many people, amusing and otherwise, and has to survive a good deal of buffeting before he can get going or make headway.

I remember some twenty years ago or more, when I was one of the teachers at the School of Dramatic Art, being asked to support George Bernard Shaw on the platform from which he was to address the students. It was a rather formidable function in the dome of His Majesty's Theatre, with Herbert Beer-bohm Tree, the founder of the Academy, in the



Chair, surrounded by some of the leading lights and some of us "professors."

The students, male and female, were spread out in rows, and Tree introduced the lecturer. Then, during a breathless silence, Shaw advanced to the front of the platform.

"I suppose I may take it," he said, "that all of you young people who are intending to adopt the stage as a profession are doing so without the consent of your parents."

Very good and true words; but not absolutely so, as applied to me, because I did not ask for consent, so my parents can hardly be said to have withheld it.

Everything of course has to have a beginning, but I do not propose to occupy much space with my own beginnings. My father was Grinham Keen, the well-known London solicitor, at one time President of the Incorporated Law Society, and my obvious destiny was his office. But even in my early years a solicitor's profession did not appeal to me, and I was brought up with a view to the Bar, relinquishing my natural place in life to my brother who, after succeeding my father, became, and still is, a Master in Chancery.

In 1865, when I was seven years old, I went to my first school—I was taken there by an aunt, as my mother was ill at the time. This school was at Brighton—and was kept by three maiden ladies, sisters, Miss Young, Miss Harriett Young and Miss Rosa Young. And very nice ladies they were, descended, as I seem to remember, from the famous Dr. Young who compiled the Latin Dictionary.

There were twenty-four boys at the school, but I remember nothing of them except that three of us happened to have been born on the same day of the

same year. Still fewer are my memories of a preparatory school at St. Leonards kept by a Rev. Jarvis—I know only that he was very free and handy with the cane. Then I went to Charterhouse—at that time in London—where my chief claim to distinction lay in the fact that I held a record for fights. Three I had; and fights were very formal affairs. One had to ask permission from the monitor of the week, then seconds and a time-keeper were appointed, and the fight was eventually held in a spot known as “Fighting Corner.”

Fiercest among my battles was one with my greatest friend, Aubrey Wilson, the result of some silly squabble. We had fourteen rounds of it before we were separated and the contest declared a draw; then we retired to wash each other’s faces as good friends as ever.

Wilson was the son of the Vicar of East Horsley. He was later at Oxford while I went to Cambridge, and I often used to spend Christmas at East Horsley, where we had a wonderful week of festivity. There were three houses in the village—the Vicarage, East Horsley Towers (the place of Lord Lovelace, the Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey), and that of a Mr. Willoughby, a London lawyer and father of several charming daughters. A dance used to be given at each of these houses in turn, and a big supper at the Vicarage for Lord Lovelace’s tenants and the farmers.

I remember at one of these suppers the Vicar was extremely attentive to the stout wife of one of the principal farmers of the neighbourhood. In his hospitality he kept filling her glass—but didn’t notice that he filled it sometimes with claret, sometimes with port. The consequence was the collapse of the lady

under the table when the moment came for the ladies to leave the room.

The supper was preparatory to a dance to which, besides the farmers, all the tradespeople around East Horsley were invited. I was dancing with an extraordinarily pretty girl, beautifully dressed and a superlatively good dancer. I hadn't the slightest idea who she was, and she was very uncommunicative. But we danced round and round the room—it was more like floating than dancing—until the music stopped. She turned to me, and with all her soul looking out of her lovely eyes, she spoke.

“My Gawd, 'ow my shift do stick to my back.”

It was at another of the balls at East Horsley Towers that I met Mrs. Langtry for the first time. She was just at the height of her original success; little did I think then that I should be acting with her some quarter of a century later.

While I was at Charterhouse, the school was moved from London to Godalming. Godalming happened to be the abode of my forbears, who had a place called Northbrook, next to Charterhouse, and the school was built on what was probably part of my grandfather's property. A number of my ancestors were buried in Godalming churchyard, and I remember one night being allowed out from school for a dance, on condition that I was back by midnight. I ran it rather fine; just as I was going back by a short cut through the churchyard the clock struck twelve, and I saw a white mysterious something hovering over the ancestral vaults of the Keen family.

Because I was already late it was impossible to turn and run in the opposite direction, so taking my courage in both hands I advanced upon the ghost

## EARLY YEARS

and hit it a tremendous blow with my umbrella—which knocked the parish voting lists off the church door!

Most ghosts are probably just as capable of rational explanation as that one. If I had run away, I should have sworn all my life that I had really seen a ghost.

Charterhouse in my time boasted a wonderful headmaster in the person of Dr. William Haig-Brown.



DR. WILLIAM HAIG-BROWN.

*A sketch drawn by Mr. Fred Kerr while at school.*

He had been a celebrated amateur boxer in his younger days, and was in great sympathy with all kinds of sport; he was also a great humorist. I remember his saying to me, when I suggested that I had “looked over” a lesson which I knew nothing about:

“Some day perhaps you will realize the difference between looking over and overlooking.”

When his health was proposed at a banquet by a local dignitary, who referred to him as "a magnificent specimen of *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*," he replied without a smile that "he was more overwhelmed by the quantity than the quality of the encomium that had been passed on him."

Mention of dinners reminds me of another one I was present at in my comparatively early years. My father, who was an extremely popular man, was constantly being asked, in his capacity as President of the Incorporated Law Society, to dine with various City Companies and public institutions in the City of London. On one occasion he was invited to one of these dinners—I think by the Leathersellers Company—and took me as the friend. The usual toasts were honoured; but Lord Wolseley, who was to have responded for the Navy, Army and Auxiliary Services, was unable, through indisposition or some reason, to be present, and his task devolved upon an elderly Colonel with a very red face.

To this day I am unable to determine whether the Colonel's speech was the outcome of a keen sense of humour or of no sense of humour at all. He never smiled, and his voice was somewhat vinous.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "whenever I find myself dining with the Leathersellers Company"—as if it were his habit to do so two or three times a week—"I am always reminded of my poor dear father, who has been dead and gone for many years. When I was a boy, he used to say to me, 'Alfred, my son, whenever you find yourself in any position of doubt or perplexity, whenever you are unable to distinguish between right and wrong, pause and ask yourself the question, What would the Leather-

sellers Company have done under similar circumstances?' ”

Three or four years ago I attended a dinner, held on the jubilee of the school's removal to Godalming, for those old boys who could still remember the event of fifty years before. There I met men whom I had not seen since the old days, including Bishops, Generals and all sorts of notabilities. The dinner was organized by F. K. W. Girdlestone, himself an old Carthusian. He was the most popular master of my day, later a housemaster, and later still my son became head monitor in his house. He died quite recently at a great age, regretted by everybody who had anything to do with the old school.

Of the old masters, I still sometimes see Mr. T. E. Page, another extremely popular man, whose erudition is only equalled by his geniality, and whose homespun trousers are the admiration of all and sundry.

I must not forget another master, Mr. Evans, a rather saturnine and satirical clergyman with whom I happened to get on very well. I recollect his calling upon me to construe a passage that began with the words *Nilus alligat*. I hadn't the faintest idea what *alligat* meant, so I made what I thought was an intelligent suggestion, and translated it into:

“The Nile was full of alligators.”

Some quarter of a century later I was getting into an omnibus in Regent Street when I was greeted with the words “*Nilus alligat*”—and there sat Mr. Evans, not a bit changed, with the same saturnine smile on his face with which he used to terrify the boys under him at Charterhouse.

After he retired he lived somewhere near the School

and was a familiar and popular figure at most of the school cricket and football matches.

After an undistinguished (except for fighting) career at Charterhouse I went to a tutor's at Ehrenbreitstein-am-Rhein. His name was Archer-Burton. He had a number of pretty daughters, and was a man of great charm and wit—wit, indeed, seemed to run in my pedagogues.

One day, for instance, after a difference of opinion with his wife, he was attacked by a girl with two of those Confession albums popular at that time, one being a record of the date of one's marriage, together with an appropriate sentiment, the other being a confession of all one's likes and dislikes. In the first book he wrote:

"This day five-and-twenty years I was married. The Lord loveth whom he chasteneth."

In the other, in answer to the question: "For what fault have you most toleration?" he wrote:

"Wife beating."

Archer-Burton had only one hand; the other he lost in a chopping-machine when a boy, and it was told of him that he said quite casually after the catastrophe:

"Don't tell my mother!"

Surely as brave an utterance as any attributed to more distinguished heroes!

Opposite his house at Ehrenbreitstein was the Royal Residence, and we were frequently brought into informal contact with the Emperor William I and the Empress Augusta. The Empress used to take her walk in the morning over one of the Rhine bridges, along the towing-path and back over the other bridge, and always had a few gracious words for any of us lads who happened to be in the Archer-Burton garden.

I can see her now, followed by a very tall footman solemnly carrying a book, an umbrella, and a dog.

The Emperor was a genial old boy, who used to vault on to his horse at seventy years of age. I once met him under rather disconcerting circumstances at Ems, a pretty village some miles away, which could only be reached over hills and through vineyards. It was a favourite walk of ours.

It happened that one day there was being held a so-called Regatta at Ems, and in order to get a good view I bethought me of a balcony at the top of the Kurhaus which looked out over the River Lahn, the scene of the regatta. I ran up the stairs, unconsciously accelerating my pace as I got nearer the top, burst open the door of the balcony and precipitated myself into the white waistcoat of an elderly gentleman, whom to my horror I recognized as the Emperor. I bolted like a hare; but that night I was sitting at the Opera, and as he came in he spotted me, and obviously related the incident to the lady he was with. He shook his fist at me and roared with laughter. I saw him many times afterwards and he always chuckled when he recognized me.

The curious natural conceit of the German—the characteristic which more than anything else brought about the Great War—was very much in evidence even in those days. I remember a youth named Gustav who always insisted on talking to us in bad English rather than allow us to carry on in passable German. He would come up to one and *apropos* of nothing, inquire with a look of intense interest:

“Sir, have you this day goose meat had?”

And when one had answered in a somewhat be-



wildered negative, he would add with an air of considerable satisfaction:

"I also not."

I remember asking him for a match one day—in German. He replied—in English. He said:

"I have not got some. When I have none, I will give you any."

But in spite of their conceit, which is a national failing, they were on the whole a kindly and friendly lot at Ehrenbreitstein. I recollect one man in particular—Franz Maas, the proprietor of the Treves Hotel at Coblenz—whose admiration and affection for England were boundless. An ex-officer in a Hussar regiment, his rather hectic youth and extravagance had resulted in his father's taking him out of the Army and installing him as proprietor and manager of the hotel. There we English boys were always welcome.

"You have been all over the world, in every country, in every city," he used to say in his somewhat queer English. "You have not been in London, you have been nowhere."

Fortunately he died a great many years ago, for I think that if he had lived to see the war, it would have broken his heart.

My one and only appearance as an amateur actor was at Ehrenbreitstein, when I played Alfred Wigan's great part in "The First Night"—a piece of presumption for which I was justly punished by being cast to play the smallest part in the play in my professional days.

From Archer-Burton to Cambridge was my next move. Again I failed to distinguish myself in any particular direction, and spent most of my time at

Newmarket. Looking back on my life, I fancy that Cambridge provided the most enjoyable part of it. Work was the last thing I thought about, but I hunted, shot, raced, played cricket a bit, and cordially detested the boating with its training and drudgery.

The tutor of Downing was at that time John Perkins, brother of Henry Perkins, the well-known Secretary of the M.C.C. John Perkins was the Secretary of the Cambridgeshire Hounds, and the great friend of any undergraduate who happened to subscribe, as I did, a fiver to the Hunt. I remember when I went in for my Little-Go he was one of the examiners. One of the *viva-voce* questions I answered, as I thought, incorrectly, and supplemented my first answer with a second, whereupon the chief examiner asked me acidly "which of the two interpretations he was to accept." I received a kick under the table from John Perkins, who was holding up his hand with two fingers spread out—an obvious tip of which, of course, I took advantage.

The dons at my college—Caius—had an irritating habit of interfering with one's amusements by enforcing attendance at College examinations, which were of no sort of importance except as a tribute to their own dignity. On a certain occasion I had promised to ride a friend's horse at the University races at Cottenham. One of those exams being called for that afternoon, I had a pair of trousers specially made to fit over my riding-breeches and boots; and I arranged for a hack to be waiting at the College gates. I went into Hall, as I was compelled to do, handed in a blank paper, rushed down the stairs where my "gyp" was waiting to peel off the trousers, and take my cap and gown. I grabbed my hat and

spurs, went at a hand canter to Cottenham, rode in the race—and did not win it.

My first visit to Newmarket and my first bet remind me of Richard Henry Fry, the most courteous and delightful of bookmakers of his own or any other time. From him I took a bet of £30 to £5 about a horse called the Crytheia Colt which, ridden by Fred Archer, ran away with a five-furlong race and gave me an unfortunate taste for racing—a taste which has rather worn off as time has gone on.

In those days I was very fond of pigeon shooting—a disgustingly cruel sport for which my taste has also worn off. We used to hold surreptitious meetings in a field a little way out of Cambridge, and there were some very good shots among us, notably Douglas Steele, Reggie Heygate, and best of all, Ward Hunt, the son of the well-known statesman. Ward Hunt, if I remember rightly, terminated his career at Cambridge by a difference of opinion with the dons in the matter of shooting rooks at the backs of the Colleges in the early morning; he came up as a quiet, inconspicuous youth and electrified us all by his extraordinary shooting.

I myself was an indifferent shot, chiefly owing to the fact that I was very short-sighted, and had not at that time taken to glasses. At a dinner one evening shortly after Hunt's arrival, some one suggested that he could give me fifteen yards in thirty and beat me. I suppose I was a little more sober than he, for I succeeded in taking £50 to £10 on the conditions of the best out of ten birds, I to shoot at fifteen yards, Hunt at thirty yards. When the day came we tossed for precedence; Hunt won and decided that I should shoot at my ten birds, so as to let him know exactly

what he had to do. I had never in my wildest dreams known what it was to shoot at fifteen yards. Whether it was possible to miss at that distance I can't say, but at any rate, I took the liberty of killing all my ten birds—which so astounded Hunt that, when his turn came, he missed his first. I offered to make the match again with the betting even, but found no takers.

One of Ward Hunt's great achievements was, when glass balls first came into being as a substitute for pigeons, his saying that it was impossible to miss one, and that he would break forty-nine out of fifty at thirty yards. Several people made bets with him, and he started on the job with a considerable amount of money depending on the result. He missed the first ball—which called forth expressions of joyous anticipation from those who were betting against him.

Then he turned round quite calmly, and said:

"Don't make such a damned noise! Will any of you bet me £50 to £5 that I don't break the other forty-nine?"

He proceeded to take all the bets he could get, and then calmly broke his nine-and-forty—and I have always had a shrewd suspicion that he missed the first on purpose. But be that as it may, Hunt was the most remarkable shot I have ever seen.

Poor Harry Roberts, who died not long ago, was our senior at Cambridge, but he used to come down to these little pigeon-shooting gatherings, which I should imagine was a lucrative field for him and for the friends who used to accompany him. On one occasion the day's shooting was followed by a dinner which Roberts gave to the pigeon-shooting fraternity at the Bull Hotel. This dinner was followed by a gamble in which I was able to participate owing to

the kind action of one of my very great friends, John Jones—whose real name I do not publish, because I believe he is still alive and the perfectly good parson of a country parish.

Jones, like myself, was absolutely stony—the result, I suppose, of a day's sport—and after the shoot we were discussing whether it would be worth our while to go to the dinner or not. John, who was the most unselfish fellow alive, solved the difficulty by saying:

"You go, and I'll get hold of some money somehow before the dinner's over."

In the middle of dinner an envelope was brought up to me, which contained a tenner, and a little later Jones himself arrived. It appeared that he had borrowed £20 from a little Jew in Barnwell, and the sad result of his kindness was that I won £50 with my tenner, while poor John lost his, and at the end of the evening he owed me £25 instead of my owing him £10.

He was an amazing creature, was John Jones, with an insatiable habit of betting on every conceivable thing. He would bet you how many flies there were on a wall; and once, when the officiating clergyman in Chapel announced the fact "There is one God," John Jones' voice was heard softly murmuring,

"I'll take six to four about that."

Some five-and-forty years after my undergraduate days, I acted in Cambridge, and I suppose it was this fact that brought me to the recollection of the authorities of my old College, for shortly afterwards I received an invitation to dine with the Master and Fellows. There were a good many of my own year at this dinner, and in looking round the old buildings I discovered that some ancient elms which used to

stand just behind my rooms had been cut down to make place for a new lecture room. This reminded me of an episode of the long ago, when the man who "kept" in the next rooms to mine had bought a brand-new rook rifle and called me in to admire it. A large rook was sitting on a bough of one of the elms, and we christened the rifle by shooting this rook, which fell headlong into a flowerpot standing outside one of Mr. Drury's windows—Mr. Drury being no less a personage than the Dean of Caius.

I am sure Mr. Drury was much too good a sportsman to have taken a severe view of our infraction of the College regulations, and the best thing we could have done would have been to have told him. But we did not. It was warm weather, and three days later a number of workmen appeared with pick-axes, and other implements, to find out what was the matter with the drains!

Among the men who were with me at Cambridge and who were to make their mark in after life was Robson, the eminent barrister who became Lord Robson. A very popular man in those days, he showed unmistakably the powers of argument which later he was to turn to such good account. He used to argue for arguing's sake, and always got the better of his opponent; and at the College Debating Society invariably spoke on the side that was getting the worst of it, and thus turned the balance of opinion in its favour. Sir James K. Fowler, the well-known physician, was another of my contemporaries. But my personal friends were mostly among the sporting set, who were probably more celebrated for their youthful escapades than for anything they achieved in later life.

We were a happy lot at Cambridge, wasting our time and our parents' money in every conceivable way, but thoroughly enjoying ourselves, and incurring, for the most part, debts which had to be met later. My father, the kindest man who ever lived, paid my debts when I came down, but my extravagant habits were not easily eradicated and very soon I had piled up another formidable list. I was ashamed to go to my father a second time, so I determined to try my luck on the stage. I was by way of eating dinners at the Inner Temple at that time, but I felt the necessity of making some money more quickly than was possible at the Bar. So I made a pretence of a visit to the country—my mother always declared that I pinned a bunch of violets on her dress when I said good-bye—went to Liverpool and bought a first-class passage on the National Line steamship *Erin*, sending a note to my people that they were not to worry themselves about me. After tipping the stewards on the ship, I landed in New York as an absolute stranger with the princely sum of eighteen-pence in my pocket.



MRS GRINHAM KLEN

Mr Fred Kerr's mother, from a sketch said to be by J S Copley, R.A.





## CHAPTER II

### NEW YORK BEFORE THE SKYSCRAPERS

THE voyage on the *Erin* was very stormy. It was described as "a hurricane" for four days on the ship's log, and after a fortnight's buffeting we arrived at New York. The *Erin* was a very primitive vessel, and I have an idea that she went down a short time afterwards.

As my money had all disappeared on my ticket, and the tips which existed even in those days, it seemed to me that the best way of making a start was to go somewhere where I should not see my bill for a week. So I took myself to the St. Nicholas, a very good hotel at the corner of Houston Street, asked for a quiet room "not too high up," and told them to pay the express fees on my baggage which was on its way from the ship. I then borrowed a New York directory, looked up the names and addresses of some likely newspapers, and started off with a portfolio full of caricatures to try my luck with editors in general.

Caricaturing had always been a hobby of mine and I had become rather good at it. To my great joy the Editor of the *Mirror*, Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske (now husband of the famous American star, Mrs. Fiske), liked my work and sent me that very night to see the first performance of a new play, with instructions to make a few drawings of members of the

cast, and some comments on the piece itself. I was sufficiently successful in my errand to induce Mr. Fiske to make my job a more or less weekly affair, and on the strength of this I took a studio at 1193, Broadway, where I was joined by the late Frank Wyatt, who, besides being a very successful comedian, was an absolutely first-rate black-and-white artist with an uncanny gift for drawing pretty girls.

I had known him before leaving England. He came out to New York with the Hanlon-Lees, a troupe of acrobatic actors with whom also appeared my dear old friend, Willy Penley. Among Frank's accomplishments was one of tying himself into knots and falling about in every possible position and under every imaginable circumstance. We went one night to a famous, but rather low, dancing hall called the Haymarket, which was modelled, on a very small scale, on the Argyle Rooms (now the Trocadero) in London. Frank and I sat in the gallery watching the dancing, when, coming to the conclusion that it was rather dull, he suddenly fell out of the gallery on to the floor among the revellers.

They picked him up and fetched brandy, and I escorted him out of the building. In the street we got into a cab, drove round the corner, and as soon as we were out of sight, dismissed the cab, turned up our coat collars and made our way back to the Haymarket. We again paid our quarter-dollar admission, re-entered unrecognized and returned to our former seats. About five minutes passed and then Frank fell out of the gallery again, spreading a consternation that is better imagined than described.

We were both very impecunious, but Providence provided us with a means of livelihood in the shape

of a tall young man from New England, who appeared one day at the studio and wished to know whether we taught drawing. It was impossible to let such an opportunity pass by, and that young man subscribed to our mutual benefit for many months, during which time we put him through every conceivable stage of instruction in drawing. He did not show the slightest promise, and I suppose we ought to have told him so, instead of encouraging him to believe that the efforts, which he proudly exhibited to his friends and which had been really drawn by ourselves, were his own masterpieces.

Another actor whom I knew before going to New York was H. M. Pitt. He had an empty flat on his hands, owing to the fact that his children had measles in England and his wife could not bring them over at the time. He therefore suggested that I should share the flat with him, each of us paying his own housekeeping expenses. When Mrs. Pitt did arrive, I went to a boarding-house in Seventh Avenue kept by an old English woman, Mrs. Bond, known affectionately to all of us by the name of Ma Bond. Her boarders consisted almost entirely of actors, many of them, like Harry Pitt, members of the Wallack Theatre Company in New York.

In those days we were given to having a good time and staying up late. We used to tumble home at almost any hour of the night, but it was difficult to be too late to find a nice supper awaiting us in the kitchen. On one occasion, however, Harry Pitt found everything shut up and everyone gone to bed. Nearly all the houses in New York in those days were built to the same plan, and most of them, it appeared, had the same latchkey; for when Pitt arrived, as he thought,

at Ma Bond's, he entered every house in the block and was thrown out by the occupants of the rooms which corresponded to his, all of which he had entered on tiptoe for fear of disturbing the other boarders. This, I need not add, happened before the days of Prohibition.

Among Mrs. Bond's boarders were Willy Elton, father of the present George Elton, and George Osmond Tearle, father of Godfrey Tearle in England, and Conway Tearle in the United States. It was Tearle who was instrumental in getting me my first engagement on the stage.

I may mention here that, with a view to the stage and to my probable failure as an actor, I had substituted the name of Kerr for Keen. I took that name for no reason except that it began with K and seemed easy. Therefore I was always known in America as Kerr.

Tearle came to me one day and said that Lester Wallack, the manager of Wallack's Theatre, wanted someone who could wear a suit of clothes and speak half a dozen lines in the small part of Sir Harry Bumper in "The School for Scandal," with which he was opening his new theatre in Thirty-first Street (that theatre is now a thing of the past). The Sir Harry Bumper was a tenor from a neighbouring church who sang well enough but whose extraordinary accent made him quite impossible for the spoken words of the part.

I therefore spoke his lines under the title of Sir Toby, in a suit of snuff-coloured satin, and in this manner became an actor for good and all.

Just before this I was lunching at Delmonico's, when a man came across the room, introduced himself to

me, and asked whether he might present me to Madame Selina Dolaro, at that time a very popular star in New York. She said she had heard that I wanted to go on the stage and that she had the part of a young Englishman in a one-act play which she was producing for her own "benefit" in a few weeks' time: would I like to play it? This of course I was overjoyed to do, and it was really my first appearance on the stage, followed by the Wallack engagement.

I can remember all sorts of things about those days. Lester Wallack was himself a good-looking, rather flashy type of actor, whose appearance went for a good deal more than his artistry. It was recorded of him that at a dress rehearsal of "She Stoops to Conquer" he met, ready dressed, on the stairs, the actor who was to play the part of Hastings and who had conscientiously cut off a rather luxuriant moustache for the sake of the period of square-cuts and patches. Lester Wallack looked at him quizzically, as if he had never seen him before, and said:

"What have you done to yourself?"

Wilmot Eyre, the actor in question, replied: "I've shaved off my moustache, Mr. Wallack." Wallack, who played young Marlowe, replied: "Well, you'll have to stick one on. I wear mine."

Of that company only Rose Coghlan and myself, as far as I know, survive. It was an interesting company, with Rose Coghlan, then a beautiful woman, as leading lady, Madame Ponisi, old John Gilbert, one of the best old comedy actors of the day, Osmond Tearle leading man, Willy Elton comedian, Alma Stanley the great beauty, and Harry Edwards among others. Harry Edwards lived in a house run by one servant, a Chinaman, who did the housework and the

cooking, received the guests, waited at table and did the work of six servants—but more efficiently. American servants were then, as now, hard to get and still harder to keep.

In this connection I remember a slavey at Ma Bond's named Jennie, an absolutely begrimed "Marchioness" all through the week; but on the nights when she went out to dances she used to appear, a perfect vision of beauty, in a fashionable and quite expensive dress—and with more than a soupçon of make-up on her face, which, relieved of its grime, was rather a pretty one.

New York was a very different place in those days from what it is now. Delmonico's and the Brunswick, at the opposite corners of Twenty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue, were the two great restaurants, and people often used to take a table at both places for the nights of the great public balls, the Arion Ball and the French Ball, to both of which I went with my old friend Sam Sondheim, a very well-off cotton broker, known as Handsome Sam—a Jew, and, like most of the Jews I have met, very artistic, very kind and very hospitable. He used to be incessant in his invitations to lunch, dine and sup, and as my financial position made it impossible for me to offer any return, I left off accepting these invitations and took to sending rather futile excuses of previous engagements.

I met him one day, and he asked me how it was that he hadn't seen me for such ages. So I blurted out the truth that I could not be always accepting hospitality which I was not in a position to repay. His answer—and no Christian ever said anything more delightful—his answer was:

"You entirely overlook the pleasure it gives me to see you."

When "The School for Scandal" had finished its course, it was succeeded by a lurid melodrama called "Youth"—a Drury Lane success—the outcome of the collaboration of three or four authors, whose métier was to wrap up half a dozen sensations out of a stock of thirty or forty ideas, any six of which put together constituted a good melodrama. Tearle played the hero, and I a detective who had to arrest him in the middle of the play, and my part consisted of one speech which, if I remember rightly, was:

"A warrant for forgery, a bill executed six months ago. I've a cab at the door."

This I delivered for about six weeks in a mysterious whisper—as I thought, very effectively—when Tearle said one evening at the end of the Act:

"If you don't look out, they'll hear you one night."

It was during the run of "Youth" that I became very friendly with old John Gilbert. He played the hero's father, an old clergyman. One of the scenes of the play was a battle, at the end of which the hero used to stagger on with a tattered flag amidst rounds of applause, accompanied by cannon and thunder sheets and all the paraphernalia and noises of theatrical warfare. I was standing in the wings next to old John.

"What damned rot!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

John Gilbert, who hated the play and always wanted to be playing "old comedy," turned round to me:

"I quite agree with you, young man. It is b——y rot!" he murmured fervently, and from that moment we were firm friends.



Gilbert never knew quite what to make of Elton, who had a habit of step-dancing on his hands, and was looked upon as a pantomimic freak by the old man. As a matter of fact, Elton was one of the most versatile comedians I ever came across. He would play a Cockney, then a Scotchman, then an Irishman, then a Jew, then a Frenchman on consecutive nights, and be as good in the one as he was in the others. This versatility was much more common in those days, and was shared by Osmond Tearle, who would play the hero in "Youth," Charles Surface, Hamlet and Macbeth in a week and be equally at home in all of them.

Our neighbours and great friends were the Daly Company, with Ada Rehan, John Drew, Jimmy Lewis, Otis Skinner, and Mrs. Gilbert. Harry Pitt transferred himself from the Wallack to the Daly Company, and as he was a great friend of mine I became very intimate with all his new confrères at Daly's. John Drew, who died only the other day, was one of my oldest and closest friends in the dramatic profession. He was the first American actor who could drink a cup of tea on the stage without the appearance of taking physic. He and Ada Rehan were a great joy in the light comedies from the French that Augustin Daly used to prepare so skillfully. I have a grateful recollection of Augustin Daly, for he was the first manager who ever answered a letter of mine or took the slightest notice of me. He and Dan Frohman, who was at that time acting manager for the Mallory's at Madison Square Theatre, were two men who encouraged me in the very early days.

Most of the good actors of those times are now,

alas, dead, but William Gillette and Otis Skinner are still carrying on the old traditions.

Poor John Drew was really a delightful creature, and in his later days he was looked upon as the doyen of the American stage. I never remember hearing anyone say an unpleasant thing about him. When we used to forgather, the fun grew fast and furious, and the hours slipped by unnoticed.

Once I met John in Philadelphia, when I was acting with Mrs. Patrick Campbell. My wife was with me, and John's niece, Ethel Barrymore, was staying at the same hotel as ourselves. We gave the ladies supper every night, saw them to their respective rooms—and then went off and finished the evening at the Philadelphia Club, from which I used to return in the small hours, and creep up to bed very quietly, so as not to disturb my wife.

Some years afterwards John came to England. I met him—with the usual result: a return to the nest at about five o'clock in the morning. As of old, I made a tremendous effort not to wake my wife, but I very well remember her sleepy voice, as the clock thumped out its five strokes:

“Is Mr. Drew in England?”

It seems only the other day that I was with him on the golf links at East Hampton, Long Island, where I was staying with my old friend Hartley Manners, and his brilliant wife, Laurette Taylor. New York will never be the same to me again without John Drew.

I remember many of the giants of the American stage of that epoch—Clara Morris, Charles Thorne, old man Stoddart, and James O'Neill, father of Eugene O'Neill. At that time I made the acquaintance of

Nat Goodwin, an acquaintance which became a friendship existing over the rest of his life. What a comedian! What a raconteur! I recollect his having supper with me and some kindred spirits in my rooms in London. The early morning found us on the pavement saying good-night and still shouting with laughter at Nat's latest, our party augmented by a policeman, a lady of the pavement, and the dustman. The noise was so great that the following day every other tenant of the building gave notice to quit.

It wasn't so much the stories themselves as the way he told them. He could make me laugh just as heartily the fiftieth time he told a story as he did the first.

I can see him now telling us about a friend whom he met on Broadway with a stiff neck which entirely prevented him from lifting his head, and who replied, in answer to Nat's inquiry as to where he was going:

"I'm going to see a balloon ascent."

This doesn't look very funny in print perhaps, but I can assure you it was very funny indeed when you saw Nat giving an imitation of his friend's effort to move his head.

After the run of "Youth" I transferred myself to the Bijou Opera House, where I joined the company of my old friend, Selina Dolaro. This was the occasion, to which I have already alluded, of my playing the Prompter in "The First Night," Harry St. Maur taking the principal part which I had filled as an amateur.

There was an old prompter at Wallack's, of the name of Wright, who in consequence of someone's

dropping a can of hot glue on him one day, had contracted the habit of looking up at the flies with every step he took on the stage.

Several of the old Wallack Company were in front at our first performance, and knowing they were there I gave an imitation of old Wright which was greeted with shouts of laughter by the Wallack contingent, while the rest of the audience, who didn't know Wright and his peculiarities, probably thought we were all idiots.

Amongst other activities of mine, I captained a cricket team, and we used to play matches against the St. George's Cricket Club on Staten Island. A great many of these St. George's men were Englishmen who had settled in New York; and one of our own team was Fred Leslie, who was playing Favart at the time.

The stage of the Fifth Avenue Theatre where "Madame Favart" was produced backed on to my studio, so that hearing the rehearsals I became very familiar with the music and most of the words. At the first performance, to which I went, the Opera dragged a good deal in consequence of a very long interpolated processional march which entirely stopped the action of the play. One of these *longueurs* had a dramatic conclusion. Just as the audience were dozing off in their seats, the manager of the theatre, James Barton Key, came on from the back of the stage, moved down between the two actors who were carrying on at the moment, held up his hand to request silence and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, with deep regret I have to announce the death of President Garfield. I am sure you will all wish to show your respect to his memory by leaving the theatre."

The audience dispersed very quietly, perhaps not altogether unthankfully, to find the paper boys shouting the death of the President, who had lain for weeks dangerously ill after his attempted assassination.

Fred Leslie was a splendid Charles Favart, and in England previously he had been a splendid Marquis de Pontsable. The original in England of Charles Favart was the inimitable Marius, best of good fellows, who was the husband of Jack, as Florence St. John was always known to her many friends.

In my very early days I used occasionally to be very short of money. I remember having drawn some posters for a Mormon play called "Ruth," written by an escaped Mormon lady, for which, to my great annoyance, I had not been paid, the result being that for several weeks I walked about with 20 cents in my pocket, relying on Ma Bond's good nature not to worry me with her bill.

It was during one of these periods of impecuniosity that I went with an equally impecunious friend, a cavalry officer who had left England under a financial cloud, to a house-warming reception at one of the Vanderbilt palaces on Fifth Avenue. My friend was the possessor of a singularly smart fur coat which he was always going to pawn, but I pointed out that if he did so he would be just as hard up again in a few days' time, and cold into the bargain, so he kept the coat and wore it. I also was very well dressed, and I could not help chuckling to myself at the ridiculous anomaly of the two best-dressed men in the room enjoying worldly possessions jointly represented by about a dollar and a half!

One morning soon after this I came down to break-

fast to find two letters waiting for me—one from my father, enclosing a cheque for £50, the other from the management of the "Ruth" Company enclosing 250 dollars for the posters, which I had written off as a bad debt. On the strength of this, my impecunious pal and I had a great feast at Delmonico's.

In those days New York Society looked with a very unfriendly eye on actors; they were entirely without social position, with the exception of one or two, such as John Drew, through whose friendly offices I became acquainted with a few of the social leaders. His family were among the most respected on the American stage. His father (whom I do not recollect) was an actor, his mother (whom I recollect very well) was a delightful actress of the old school, rather like our own Mrs. Stirling—whom I saw play with Jefferson in "She Stoops to Conquer."

Jefferson was a prince among comedians. We seem to remember him in this country chiefly as Rip van Winkle, but his Bob Acres was a thing of unalloyed joy. What a charming old man he was, how kind and considerate to all the younger actors and actresses with whom he was brought into contact! I remember Nat Goodwin telling me a story of how, when he was on tour, he found himself playing in the same town as Jefferson, and playing moreover one of Jefferson's own particular parts. He dreaded meeting Jefferson, but when he did, instead of showing resentment, Jefferson offered, if Nat liked, to call a rehearsal, to show him some of his own special business in the part, with which Nat was unacquainted—surely a wonderful instance of good-fellowship not many old actors would extend to their younger rivals.

It seems curious to me now to look back upon the Lambs Club of those days. It still flourishes as a representative actors' club of the rather free and easy type. In its early days, of which I am now writing, Lester Wallack was the "Shepherd," Harry Edwards the "Boy," and a very good fellow whose name has escaped me was the "Lambkin." I am not quite sure if the present Lambs keep up those old offices.

The Club was, if I remember rightly, somewhere down-town about Sixteenth Street, and its near neighbour was Brown's Chop House, the founder of which was an old actor who used to play butlers at Wallack's Theatre because he looked so typically English. He had never, I believe, crossed the ocean in his life, but it was a brilliant idea of his to open the Chop House in New York. It became an extraordinarily popular after-the-theatre supper institution, where many of us foregathered and supped on excellent chops, Welsh rarebits and old ale. I remember old Brown—he was a nice old chap and always pleased to see his theatrical friends. To go back for a moment to the Lambs, they were founded shortly before the time I speak of, and had some connection with an English Club of the same name, the regalia of which was presented to the New York Lambs by Sir John Hare. The Club is more or less on all fours with the Green Room Club in London, and, I should imagine, of much the same age. On my numerous visits to New York, in common with most Englishmen, I have received unvarying hospitality from the Lambs and look upon myself as almost their oldest guest.

This introduction of mine to New York lasted about a year, and as I had made a real start as an actor

and was very homesick, I made up my mind to return to England, firmly under the impression that my future was assured, and that I should have no difficulty in making the fortune to which I was quite convinced I was entitled.



## CHAPTER III

### BEGINNINGS IN ENGLAND

ON returning to England I was greeted with great joy by my father and mother, who were quite reconciled to my going on the stage and shared to the full my conviction that the stage was greatly to be congratulated. After living in thorough appreciation of the comforts of home for a short holiday, I managed to get a job on tour in a play by George R. Sims, called "The Member for Slocum." The part I played might well have been written for me a few years later, but that did not prevent my getting the sack for incompetence during my first week.

This took the form of a fortnight's notice, and I seriously thought of retiring gracefully from the stage and sticking to my black-and-white efforts, but it happened that on one of my two last weeks I was playing in Liverpool, when, to my delight, I ran across Osmond Tearle, who like myself was just home from America. Tearle had seen the performance and, to my intense astonishment, liked my playing of the part and persuaded me to go on with the job. Another man who saw me when, as I thought, I was under sentence of death, was Sir Arthur Pinero. A good deal hung on this, as I shall later explain.

After leaving the "Member for Slocum" Company, I spent my time answering advertisements in the

Wanted columns of the *Era*; which resulted in my joining Miss Sophie Miles, a lady who had been in her time leading woman to Charles Kean. Amongst her other performances she used to play Hamlet—and a very good Hamlet she was. She remembered most of Kean's business, and her appearance in the part was very boyish—an attribute which, in my opinion, Hamlet needs but seldom gets.

She was married to an exceedingly hefty man of the name of Shorey, who, I fancy, had previously had some more or less professional connection with the ring. At any rate, he was a formidable antagonist; and once I had a row with him when we were playing "Leah the Forsaken." I was the parson who was about to join Sam Shorey and Sophie Miles in holy matrimony; the scene at the church door was set when the row took place, and my old penchant for fighting re-asserted itself, with the result that when the curtain went up Shorey and I were having a very pretty set-to. I should probably have got a good deal the worst of it but for this timely intervention.

We both darted through a door off the stage—and fell right into a mud-heap in the yard outside. We then had to clamber back and make our stage entrance through the church door, amid the sympathetic cheers of the inhabitants of Crewe—I think it was Crewe; anyway, it was some one-horse little town in the Black Country.

During the time I was with Sophie Miles, it was quite the fashion for actors to write their own notices in the *Stage* and the *Era*. The local critic was generally the greengrocer or some earnest student of the drama, whose good graces were easily obtained

by means of a judicious bottle of stout. I can remember one of these critics who, having exhausted every adulatory adjective in the language, found he had omitted to notice the Ghost in "Hamlet." So he wound up his criticism with the words:

"Mr. Dillon made a pleasing and a gentlemanly ghost."

Four of us used to live together, and one did the catering—which I think used to work out at fourteen shillings apiece for a week (Oh, for the good old times!). I did not, however, stay very long with this Company, but found a certain Miss Leigh Noel who was playing a Shakespearean repertoire under the auspices of Mr. J. C. Chute—one of the Bristol Chutes and uncle of the two young Chutes who carried on the Bristol Theatre for so many years.

She opened her tour at Hastings. I found lodgings at the house of a very ancient dame, who informed me that hers was the oldest family in the town and she, as far as I can remember, was the oldest inhabitant. While arranging terms together, we stood at her back door, which looked up a long narrow strip of garden terminating in a gate. She asked me in the course of conversation what I was doing in Hastings, to which I answered with a good deal of assurance that I was acting there for a week.

"Oh," said she, "then you probably know my son."

I tried to look as though the probability were a certainty, but as a measure of precaution managed a tactful inquiry as to who her son might be.

At that moment the gate at the end of the garden opened, and a quite extraordinary individual came down the path. He was very short and swarthy.

His hands dangled almost to the ground, and he seemed to have no legs at all. The old lady indicated him with tremendous pride.

"This is my son," she said. "The Royal Sussex Dwarf."

I recall one or two of the men of that Company. One was poor A. G. Stewart, who died under tragic circumstances many years afterwards, and who was known as the Sesquipedalian Comedian from his extraordinary habit of using polysyllabic words. He was originally a barrister in Australia, and incidentally a very fast bowler and an amazingly good boxer. Another was Jack Manley, a curious survival of the old-time leading man. There was no trick of acting which Jack Manley did not know. I have often seen him declaiming a speech of which he did not know a single word, but he had it pinned inside his hat, which he waved about as he read the words—a most useful trick if artistically accomplished.

Jack used to think nothing of sitting up till two or three in the morning, getting up at six, and then breaking the ice to have a swim in any river or pond that happened to be handy. He was a cheery and lovable fellow who, in spite of his peculiarities, had the makings of a very fine actor.

I was cast to play Thurio, in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," a part which the author describes as "a foolish gentleman." I somehow felt that at last my time had arrived, and took the greatest possible trouble in studying not merely the words but the characteristics and appearance of this "foolish gentleman." I had a rather effective exit speech; imagine my horror, on hearing Manley speak it one night in place of his own, which he had entirely forgotten.

Silvius, in "As You Like It," was probably my star part at this period; I succeeded in making him into a low-comedy character and always extracted roars of laughter which Shakespeare would hardly have approved of.

Miss Leigh Noel had a habit of fainting whenever she forgot her words, so that the curtain had to be rung down and the play held up until she had recovered. This habit was more pronounced in "As You Like It" than in any other piece. After I had caught her in my arms for several nights in the same place on the stage, I audibly announced my intention not to be on that side and at that moment any more. The fainting Rosalind heard this, and next night arranged her faint differently—so that someone else got the benefit of it.

My next engagement was with Miss Wallis—also obtained through the advertisement columns of the *Era* (young actors please note). Miss Wallis was a very sound Shakespearean actress, perhaps rather lacking in magnetism or whatever it is that makes the great actress. She was a very nice woman, and was married to one, John Lankester, a wealthy Northern manufacturer, who built the Shaftesbury Theatre as a home for his wife's activities.

We played a week at Wolverhampton, and the bills all announced:

"Miss Wallis" (in very large letters) "supported by" (in much smaller letters) "Mr. George Alexander, by kind permission of Messrs. Hare & Kendal, and" (in smaller letters still) "distinguished London Company."

This semi-starring of George Alexander was not at all popular with the older members of the Com-

pany, which included Charlie Groves and George Warde. It was my first meeting with Alexander, who was becoming a popular juvenile actor at the St. James's Theatre. It fell to him to play Romeo, Orlando and Benedict all in the same week, parts which he had studied from what was known as Cumberland's Edition, whereas Miss Wallis had invariably played the acting edition known as French's.

Consequently there were many alarming pauses when neither Alexander nor Miss Wallis had the faintest idea what to say next. It was during one of the longest of these pauses that George Warde, who was the Mercutio of the evening, and who was walking up and down the back of the stage waiting for his cue, said in a voice which, intended to be a whisper, reverberated all round the theatre:

"By kind permission of Messrs. Hare & Kendal!"

Groves was an admirable Shakespearean comedian who became famous in after life as John Hare's protagonist in "A Pair of Spectacles." Another member of the Company was poor Louis Calvert, who died not long ago in New York where he had been playing for many years. He was steeped in the Shakespearean tradition handed down to him by both his father and his mother (a wonderful actress, old Mrs. Calvert), a tradition coming in the first instance from Charles Dillon, whom Calvert was fond of citing as the greatest Shakespearean actor of all time.

One day I had an answer to one of my advertisements from Fred Charles, who was managing a week's performance at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. I arranged with him to play the part of Tofts in "The Unequal Match." The Harry Arncliffe of

the occasion was Morton Selten, then extremely good looking and (like myself) a very incompetent actor—a reproach which, in his case, at all events, has been happily removed.

His knowledge of the words of Harry Arncliffe was curiously incomplete, and after a series of awful dry-ups in the first Act, I went to his dressing-room to sympathize with him and to bid him buck up and be of good cheer. I expected to find him in the



last stages of remorse and despair; but he was sitting on a chair while his dresser exhibited some six or eight pairs of trousers, his only preoccupation being which of these pairs should adorn him on his next appearance.

The Windsor engagement led to another, with Ada Cavendish, for whom Fred Charles was acting manager. Ada Cavendish was a very beautiful woman and a very fine actress. Her great part was Mercy Merrick in "The New Magdalen," which

naturally was her strong card on tour, and I was cast to play the German doctor—a piece of great good luck for me, and like many slices of luck, an absolute accident. Originally I had been engaged to play “Walking Gentlemen” and Charles Allerton “Old Men,” and properly speaking, the part of the German doctor belonged to him. But Allerton was an eccentric creature. He had once taken a theatre in London to play Hamlet, and if he wasn’t playing Hamlet he didn’t much care what he was playing. So when the French doctor was handed to him and the German to me he was rather pleased than otherwise, for the latter was more trouble than the former. His unconscious self-denial gave me the opportunity of making my first real success, and paved the way for my appearance in London.

Poor Allerton, who was an indifferent actor, was a very humorous writer. He used to contribute a column to the *Sporting Times* of those days called “Philosophy, by Jehoshaphat Junior.”

“Strange bedfellows make us acquainted with adversity” and “Many a man glories in the fidelity of his wife, overlooking the fact that it accounts for the ugliness of his children” were two of his characteristic apothegms.

While with Ada Cavendish, we played a piece of which I forget the name—an early effort of A. C. Calmour’s. In this play I was a farmer’s son; it was the low-comedy part of the play, and rather a good one. I had a mother, a father, a sister and a sweetheart, and as a family we constituted the under-plot. The five of us held a council of war as to what dialect we should employ to give some sort of reality to our family relationship. One of us could speak



Scotch, another Irish, a third Yorkshire and a fourth Devonshire. I could only speak Cockney, and as mine was by far the longest of the five parts I suggested that we should drop our h's and let it go at that.

We were warmly congratulated by the Brighton newspapers the following morning on our perfect presentation of a Wiltshire farmer's family.

This part was also the means of procuring me the greatest compliment that has ever been paid me. For when we were playing at Bradford, I went after the performance to the public-house next door to the theatre for a glass of beer. I was banged on the back by an enormous man about eight feet high, in corduroys and leggings.

"Coom an' 'ave a drink along a' me an' my pals," he said.

Ignoring a feeble protest on my part, he grabbed me by the shoulder, more or less carried me across the room to where his friends were sitting in a row, all corduroys and velveteens, and having introduced me to them, said:

"My vaather wus a varmer, his vaather wus a varmer, I'm a varmer, all these 'ere are varmers—you're just like the whole bally lot o' us. Sit down. Have a drink."

A rough-and-ready piece of encouragement, for which I could not be otherwise than grateful!

One of Ada Cavendish's parts was Camille; I was Gaston Rieux on the occasion of her first performance. The strain of playing this great part for the first time was almost too much for her, and there seemed a possibility—one might almost say a probability—of her breaking down altogether in the last Act.

Fortunately I had played Gaston with another Camille—Sophie Miles—and seeing the nervous tension from which Miss Cavendish was suffering, I took my chair from its prearranged position (in which my face was turned towards the audience) and placed it on the other side of her bed with my back to the house. As she lay there in the death scene I said to her:

“Take it easy. Take your words from me, and it’ll be all right.”

The relief which she felt at this unexpected aid enabled her to recover her strength, to finish the Act triumphantly, and to make a huge success.

I shall always remember her gratitude.

When we played “Camille” we used to pick up a super in each town to play the flunkey whose duty it was to announce Camille and de Varville in the third Act. For some reason known only to the stage manager, they were announced in French, although the rest of the piece was in English, and a great deal of time on Monday mornings had to be spent in teaching the super the more or less correct pronunciation. At Leeds we secured an extraordinarily stupid Yorkshire “tyke”; he had to announce:

“Mademoiselle Camille Gautier et Monsieur le Comte de Varville.”

But he couldn’t get anywhere near it, and grew thoroughly sulky as he was hauled over the coals time after time. When the announcement is made, Gaston Rieux is playing cards with Armand Duval, and to emphasize the importance of the entrance Gaston looks up and demands a repetition of the names.

Our friend at Leeds came upon the stage, and announced with a look of quiet disfavour at Mark Quinton, who was the Armand Duval, and myself:

"Madam-ossell Camel Goater and Mossoo the Condy Baba."

Following my part, I looked up from my cards.

"Who?" I demanded.

"You 'eard," he replied, and made his exit.

While on this tour I made the acquaintance of one of the last of the real old-fashioned spectacular stars. T. C. King was his name, and he suggested the type of actor that *Punch* was fond of satirizing. He was playing at Pullan's Theatre, in Bradford, when we were at the Theatre Royal, and I was taken across to a neighbouring public-house where the old gentleman sat in state and held a sort of reception every afternoon. He received me with as great empressement as a medieval emperor might have shown, offered me a clay pipe and a glass of gin and water, and when I got up to go, put out his hand and said:

"Good-bye, me young friend. It is always a pleasure to me to meet the younger members of me craft. I only hope to God that when ye arrive at my time of life, it won't find ye playing Shakespeare to eighty in the pound."

Threepence was the price of the Gallery at Pullan's Theatre, where he was playing "*Coriolanus*."

Wilkie Collins, the author of "*The New Magdalen*," both the book and the play, wrote me a letter in which he said, after some very delightful things about my Dr. Wetzels, that he should watch my career with great interest; and he selected me as the only one of the country Company to play his own

part in the piece when Ada Cavendish revived it in London shortly afterwards. Frank Archer was the original clergyman-hero and he repeated his performance, while Mark Quinton, who had been the leading man on tour, took the juvenile part in London. This revival was the christening performance of the Novelty Theatre, now the Kingsway. It was followed by a farce called "Nita's First" under the management of Miss Nellie Harris, sister of Druriolanus, as Gus Harris used to be called, and wife of Horace Sedger. "Nita's First" was succeeded by a burlesque of which I forget the name, written by William Yardley, with Harry Nicholls and Kate Vaughan as its chief attractions. Poor Bill Yardley, one of the greatest cricketers of his time, had a very pretty wit and was one of the original staff of the "Pink 'Un."

I remember meeting him in New York at a time when Fortune had not been kind to him, and in the course of conversation he said that he thought baseball a better game than cricket.

"My dear Bill," I answered, "why you should be hard up in New York while holding those views is a mystery to me. Why not write an article for *The Spirit of the Times* with the headline 'Great English Cricketer, Captain of Cambridge Eleven, Thinks Baseball Better Game Than Cricket'? The editor of any sporting paper in New York would give you untold riches for such tribute to America's native and peculiar modesty."

He took the hint, which resulted, I am glad to say, in considerable, if temporary, accretion of wealth.

Kate Vaughan was an adorable creature, absolutely worshipped by all of us youngsters in the theatre.

She was married at that time to Colonel the Hon. Fred Wellesley, and they lived at Merton Abbey, Wimbledon, formerly the home of Nelson's Lady Hamilton. A very cheery and hospitable couple they were, and I can see us now sitting round the fire at the Abbey on a winter evening, eating roast chestnuts and telling stories till the small hours of the morning. Herman Vezin used to be one of the party, and Jimmy Fernandez, George Delacher and poor Teddy Gardiner, who like myself was playing at the Novelty Theatre, and who afterwards became Miss Kate Rorke's first husband.

Poor Kate Vaughan, who throughout her meteoric, butterfly life was no one's enemy but her own! *Requiescat in pace.*

Herman Vezin, an actor of a much older school than myself, enjoyed a great reputation for elocution—which word is much used, but little understood. I used to say to my pupils at the School of Dramatic Art: "For goodness' sake, forget that you have ever had lessons in elocution." The word as applied to acting has always seemed to me an excuse for every kind of artificiality. Its true meaning seems to have escaped its professors: it means speaking out, and emphatically does not mean speaking pedantically.

Vezin was a Dickensian fellow who lived a solitary life in a curious little flat in Lancaster Place, just by Waterloo Bridge. He was an interesting old man, and was always full of kindness and encouragement to those younger than himself.

I have mentioned George Delacher. Very few actors there were of whom George was not a friend. He was the Honorary Secretary of the Green Room Club and was much beloved by all its members.

I recollect a rather low-down trick that was played on us at the Novelty Theatre by the management, represented by a Captain Riddell. Riddell could not free himself from the notion that a theatrical Company should be treated like a platoon of soldiers; he was really rather a good fellow, but intensely unpopular owing to this penchant for military discipline. In those days, one matinee a week was the rule, and Riddell came to us on behalf of the management with the suggestion that, as we were a young Company and had just opened a new theatre, it would be to everybody's advantage to play two matinees a week instead of one; and didn't we think it would be a diplomatic concession to play both at the price of one?—that is to say, for half salaries.

After discussion we decided that it would be a great advertisement, and evidence of our success, to fall in with his idea. But when we had played two matinees for a couple or three weeks, the extra one was abandoned, and we found ourselves playing the original one a week—at half salaries. I wore a large curly moustache in the part I was playing, which I abandoned at the first of these half-salary matinees. Meeting Riddell on the stairs, and in answer to his blank look of surprise at the alteration in my appearance, I said:

“Half salary, half make-up. And think yourself damned lucky if you get more than half the words!”

My squabbles with Riddell resulted in my receiving, on a certain Tuesday night, a notice that my services would be dispensed with on the following Saturday week. A fortnight's notice, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary, was the recognized rule in those days, as I suppose it is now; and I got a bit

of my own back by waiting until the Saturday night in question, and sending down to Riddell to ask him to see me just before the performance.

"You think you have the right to give me ten days' notice," I said. "Well, I have just as good a right to give you ten minutes' notice. I am not going on to-night."

Riddell exploded with wrath, and expostulated warmly; but as the audience were already in the theatre, and there was no one to take my part, I had little serious difficulty in winning the battle, and my engagement was renewed for the run of the play at £1 a week more than I had been getting!

It was about this time that I became a member of the Green Room Club, my first visit to which was as the guest of Harry Reeves Smith, whom I had met in America at the same time as Frank Wyatt and Penley as a member of the Hanlon-Lees Company. He introduced me that evening to an old actor, now, alas, dead, who was for many years one of my very great friends—James Fernandez. A glorious character, Fernandez, always cheerful, always jolly, always encouraging to those younger than himself: and never was he known to say an unkind or derogatory thing about any single human being.

He reminded me a little of my own father, of whom it was said, in an obituary notice in the *Globe*, that he was a lawyer who was never known to say an unkind word or do an unjust action.

Jimmy Fernandez and Arthur Williams used to keep the whole Club going with their stories, the best of which were, unfortunately, hardly adapted to the printed page.

I have already mentioned that Sir Arthur Pinero

was privileged to witness the performance which nearly settled me as an actor. Remembering this, oddly enough, he suggested me to Messrs. Clayton and Cecil as the young man he wanted for a part in "The Magistrate," the first of the brilliant series of farces which he wrote for the Court Theatre. The first piece I think I played in with Clayton and Cecil was "Young Mrs. Winthrop" by Brunson Howard, which was followed by Pinero's "The Magistrate."

In "Young Mrs. Winthrop" I played the husband to Mrs. John Wood, then at her very best—and what a best! There will never be another like her. Like most great ladies, she was something of an autocrat, and rather resented a very young man being called upon to portray her husband—inasmuch as she herself, though a very handsome woman, could hardly be said to look girlish, whereas I probably still looked more or less a boy.

I got over this difficulty by the aid of a very large moustache; this both added the necessary ten years to my appearance, and gave me a place in Mrs. Wood's good graces—a place which, I am glad to say, I retained throughout her lifetime.

In the Company of "Young Mrs. Winthrop," besides Mrs. Wood, were Marion Terry, John Clayton, Harry Conway, Rose Norreys, and Reeves Smith, and most of these were later to play in "The Magistrate," with the addition of Arthur Cecil, Albert Chevalier, Harry Eversfield and others. This farce may almost be said to have been epoch-making, for it entirely dispensed with trick doors and windows and bedrooms; all the characters said and did exactly what they would have said and done under the



circumstances, which were perfectly natural, but uproariously funny, and it completely restored the fortunes of the Clayton and Cecil management.

These two formed a very adorable couple. Clayton was an extraordinarily fine actor, very much admired by the French actors of his day. The keynote of his acting was a great sincerity and simplicity which, added to a conspicuous sense of humour, found him, an old "leading man," absolutely in his element as Colonel Lukin in "The Magistrate." He was a wonderful stage manager too, and I always feel that what merit there may be in my own acting I probably owe to Clayton's early influence.

Cecil was just the opposite kind of man—equally adorable—but his style of acting was very different. While Clayton's acting was broad, Cecil's was full of detail to an extent that might almost be accounted finicky. But he was a much better actor than actors gave him credit for being, and it was only when I saw his part in "The Magistrate" played years afterwards by another very famous actor that I realized how extremely good Arthur Cecil really was.

He used to give little supper-parties at the Court Theatre, at which I was sometimes a guest. After one of these suppers Corney Grain, myself and Dr. Matthews, who practised in Suffolk Street, drove back together from the Court in a four-wheeled cab. Matthews was amazingly like King Edward—Prince of Wales as he was then—and as we all lived in the near neighbourhood, we told the cabman to drive to Marlborough House. Arrived there the cabman, firmly under the impression that he was driving the Prince of Wales, climbed off his box, opened the

door of the cab, hat in hand, and was a good deal disappointed at seeing us all march off in different directions without even ringing the bell of Marlborough House.

Corney Grain was a distant connection of my mother's, and I had known him ever since I was a small boy. His was a great talent in its way. He was the most popular entertainer of his time, and to get Corney Grain as the attraction was to ensure the success of any evening party.

Another member of "The Magistrate" Company was Albert Chevalier, an actor of French extraction who was usually cast to play broken-English parts. He was a very good and finished little actor who was immensely popular with all of us, and who used to sing little songs in the dressing-room—songs which had been written and composed by himself and his brother. These were so quaint and original that I was always urging him to go on the music halls, where I felt sure a fortune awaited him. I met him some years afterwards at the Avenue Theatre (now the Playhouse), where he and I both took part in the first play in which George Alexander appeared as a manager. Chevalier was still playing second- and third-rate parts, but it was soon after this that he yielded to the arguments of his friends, obtained an engagement in a London music hall, and took the public by storm with "My Old Dutch" and "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road." For a long time he was at the very top of the variety profession, and I always rather regretted his coming back to the legitimate stage, as he did in after life, for I do not think he was nearly as good an actor as he was entertainer.

"The Magistrate" ran a year, and was followed by "The Schoolmistress" and "Dandy Dick," both of which ran the same time. In the former I played a naval lieutenant, and going home one night in the Underground, I found myself in a carriage with some people who had evidently seen the piece and were discussing me. I wore a beard in the part, so they did not recognize me; but I was amused to learn that one of them knew me very well, for he told his friends that I actually was a sailor, and that my habit of stooping slightly was the consequence of leaning over the rails of the ship.

"Dandy Dick" saw the end of the old Court Theatre and was continued for a time at Toole's Theatre. It was about then that Clayton died—a great loss to the stage and to all his friends.

I only once had a serious disagreement with him. After we had both gone to our respective dressing-rooms in high dudgeon, I came down the stairs to begin the next Act, when I heard Clayton calling to me as I passed his door. I entered his room, still in great indignation, and quite prepared to continue the argument, and I was greeted with:

"Well, have you sufficiently recovered your temper to take some Scotch whisky?"

Like most managers, he was bombarded with plays, which used generally to find their way on to a high shelf in his dressing-room. A wrathful author once became very abusive on receiving no reply to the many letters he had written about a play he had submitted some time before. At last Clayton stirred himself up to return the play, with this letter:

"My dear Sir,  
I have read your play.  
Oh, my dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,  
JOHN CLAYTON."

I can never forget the old Court Theatre, where we were more like a happy family than a theatrical Company, and where old Veasy, the stage door-keeper, and his wife, an excellent cook, used to provide luncheon in the shape of a first-rate joint to which we all paid attention, the managers, the leading lady and the swells sitting side by side and hobnobbing with the most humble members of the Company.

But although the old Court Theatre was no more, my connection with Pinero was by no means over. Edward Terry continued the Pinero series with another and entirely different kind of play, "Sweet Lavender." This whimsical and fragrant idyll was an even greater success than the farces had been, and ran about two years. Poor little Rose Norreys, now, I regret to say, an invalid, was Sweet Lavender, Edward Terry was Dick Phenyl, almost his greatest part, Bernard Partridge (now one of *Punch's* brightest stars), under the name of Bernard Gould, was the hero, while others in the cast were Alfred Bishop, Carlotta Addison, Brandon Thomas, and last but not least, Maude Millett, the worshipped idol of every undergraduate and probably the most representative English girl who was ever on the stage, the kind of wholesome English girl with whom the whole world longs to play lawn tennis or to go on the river. She was a very great friend of mine and of my people

—a friendship which lasted right up to her death shortly after the War.

Brandon Thomas was an eccentric genius, of whom I was to see a good deal in after life. He eventually left the cast of "Sweet Lavender," to Terry's great indignation, in order to play in a one-act play which he had written himself, and his difference with Terry resulted in a lawsuit for damages brought by Terry. I remember Comyns Carr, being called to give evidence on Terry's behalf, saying to me with a despairing gesture:

"I don't know what Terry wants me to say. I don't see how an actor can damage a play except by playing in it."

The breach was, in the end, healed between Terry and Thomas. Terry was probably the best of the old school of eccentric comedians; he relied a good deal upon peculiarities of voice and appearance, but was an extraordinarily finished actor, as sincere and convincing as he was comic. He had a thoroughly undeserved reputation for parsimony, which simply meant that he was sensible enough to live the life of an English country gentleman, churchwarden and trustee of his parish, a liberal subscriber to various charities, and highly respected by all his friends and neighbours, instead of wasting his money in the public-houses which in those days took the place of clubs for many actors. He was a very good friend to me, and I had a great affection and respect for him.

One of the most striking differences between those days and now—I speak of nearly fifty years ago—is in the matter of rents. When I first came to London I was passing rich on £3 10s. a week, and had chambers on the top floor of a house in Chapel

## BEGINNINGS IN ENGLAND

Street, Bedford Row, at a rental of £28 a year. I launched out, after going to the Court Theatre, into Duke Street, St. James's, where I paid £60 a year for rooms which would nowadays probably fetch £200. My salary meanwhile had risen to £8 a week, on which I lived like a fighting cock, did myself extremely well, and kept a horse. Imagine doing all that on £8 a week—and reflect on what people mean when they talk about the good old days.

After about eighteen months of "Sweet Lavender" I was invited to go back to America in "Bootles' Baby," a play written on Mrs. Stannard's book, which had been a great success in London.

## CHAPTER IV

### AMERICA AND LONDON—MY MARRIAGE

**I** PAID my second visit to New York some eight or nine years after my first. New York has a disconcerting habit of entirely changing its appearance every five years or so, and I found things greatly altered. Ma Bond and her husband were both gone, Wallack's Company had ceased to exist and all its members had been disbanded, and I lived at the Turkish Baths in Lafayette Place.

"Bootles' Baby" was done under the auspices of Kate Claxton, who had risen to eminence through her performance in "The Two Orphans." She was then married to Charlie Stevenson, now the doyen of the Lambs' Club. He was the Bootles; he was probably the best-looking man of his time on the stage. An Irishman, he went to America with Dion Boucicault and has remained there practically ever since.

Wilton Lackaye was another member of the cast. It was a pose of Lackaye's to assume a great distaste for Englishmen, which I think was more than anything an excuse for his smart and rather bitter sayings. As a matter of fact, he is a very good fellow, and has always been a great friend of mine. I fancy his opinion of England altered a bit when he came over and played successfully in London in "The Idler" with George Alexander.

On his return to America after this visit he was asked by a very boring Englishman whether he found anything at all better in London than in New York.

"Yes," replied Lackaye, "Englishmen."

I saw a great deal of Dion Boucicault, who used to hold classes on the stage of the Madison Square Theatre when we were playing "Bootles' Baby." I had met him years before when, with Charles Reade, he was a friend of my father's. He was now an old man of extraordinary charm, and when I said good-bye to him and hoped we should meet again, he answered:

"No, my boy. I've had a good innings, but I shan't get through this winter."

And sure enough his prognostication proved to be correct, although when he made it he appeared to have years of health and strength in front of him.

It seems only the other day that two now elderly gentlemen—one of them being Boucicault's son, Dot, and the other myself—were playing cricket together as boys at Eastbourne in the very early days of Devonshire Park.

Probably I should have been a richer man if I had stayed in America, for I made a great hit as the soldier servant in the play, and received several handsome offers from American managers.

The baby of Bootles' was a delightful child about ten years old, named Gertie Homan; we were immense friends, and used to romp together and have great fun in the course of the piece. When on the last few nights of the run, owing to managerial complications, I had to come on as the villain, and Gertie, instead of romping with me, had to portray intense dis-



like, she gave me one look and burst into tears of anguish.

She married and, I believe, retired from the stage when quite young.

Charlie Stevenson was very fond of yachting, and was a prominent member of the Larchmont Yacht Club. He had a charming cottage at Larchmont, in which he and his wife used to take refuge from the New York summer heat. On one occasion when I was staying with them, he and I were completely becalmed in his yacht, and it looked as if there would be no performance of "Bootles' Baby" that night. However, a puff of wind got us in just in time to catch the last possible train and to arrive at the theatre; three or four overtures had been played and the management was on the point of dismissing the audience.

From my knowledge of the two countries, I should say that there is little to choose between English and American audiences except that the Americans are the kinder and more polite. In "Bootles' Baby," as the servant, I began the play with nothing to do except to move the furniture and open the door for one of the other characters. On the first night I was given no sort of reception; but on making my exit a quite unmerited round of applause was accorded me. Evidently the audience had recognized in me an actor new to themselves, and that was their kindly way of making me welcome. I can hardly see the Gallery First Nighters or the Playgoers Club putting themselves out of their way in such a manner for a young American.

This must have been about the time I first knew the Lotos Club, of which I have now been a member

for many years. I was introduced to it by Harry French and Bronson Howard, who, by the way, was brother-in-law to Sir Charles Wyndham. He was the author of many successful plays besides "Young Mrs. Winthrop." The Lotos in those days was, as it is now, a Bohemian Club of great charm, and among its members were many prominent actors, musicians, literary folk and, above all, artists. An artist member usually contributed a picture to the Club collection—which is a fine one and includes works by Homer and other famous American artists, among whom was my old friend Harry Ranger, whose studio I often used to sit in while Harry alternated his time between painting pictures and playing on the church organ which occupied one side of the studio.

The Club, if I remember rightly, was situated on Fifth Avenue, just below Madison Square, and I have known it in all of its several migrations since those days. The reason I became a member of it in after years was that I felt absolutely ashamed of accepting its ceaseless hospitality. This hospitality is an amazing feature of American Clubs, which it is very difficult for us to repay adequately in this country.

This visit of mine to New York was a short one. After six or eight weeks "Bootles' Baby" went on tour, and I returned to England.

But a rather important event took place during those few weeks—Mr. and Mrs. Kendal paid their first professional visit to the United States. Kendal's brother, Charles Garthorne, was in the "Bootles' Baby" Company, so I naturally saw a good deal of the great actress and her husband. In their own Company was George Glendinning, who afterwards

married Miss Jessie Milward. Glendinning was a fine, athletic, muscular young chap in those days, and happening to go out sightseeing on his first night in New York, he finished up at some Sixth Avenue dive—Tom Gould's I think it was.

In the course of his peregrinations he had been introduced to rye whisky; the effect of this unaccustomed lubricant was that the evening culminated in his having a free fight with half a dozen policemen, all of whom he floored in the course of the contest. Naturally the fracas was too good for the newspapers to miss, and one of them appeared next day with the headline:

"It took six policemen to shift burly British actor from Tom Gould's to Jefferson Market Police Station."

Mrs. Kendal was beside herself with horror. "The disgrace!" she exclaimed to me. "A man of our Company! How can we face the New York public on our opening night?"

"My dear Mrs. Kendal, don't worry," I replied. "Only one person will get a greater reception than yourself on your first night—and that'll be Glendinning."

Obviously Mrs. Kendal did not understand the feelings with which New York regarded its police at that time; and true to my prophecy, the incident ensured Glendinning's permanent popularity there.

Miss Violet Vanbrugh was also in Mrs. Kendal's Company. Very shortly after my return to London I passed in Piccadilly a lady so exactly like her that I almost stopped her with the information that I had seen her sister in New York only a few days

previously, that she was very well and had made a great success.

As I didn't know the lady, however, my courage failed me. But that very afternoon, to my utter astonishment, I was introduced to her at a reception that was being given to Ellen Terry. She was Mrs. Barnes, who certainly looked much more like Miss Vanbrugh's elder sister than her mother.

By this time I had become in some demand as a light comedian, and on my return to London I received the distinction of being called upon to play Sir Charles Wyndham's great part in "Pink Dominoes" when it was revived at the Criterion Theatre in Wyndham's absence. I dressed with Herbert Standing, who was playing the part he had originally played. Our ladies included Miss Fanny Robertson (a near relation of Tom Robertson, author of "Caste," and of Mrs. Kendal), with whom I had previously acted in "Nita's First" at the Novelty Theatre.

Herbert Standing was a curious fellow, of whom I was to see a good deal. He was a very capable actor, and incidentally a good boxer—an accomplishment which made him rather vain and a trifle belligerent. His family were all connected with the stage, and I knew two of his brothers, Frank Celli and William Carleton (both actors). Carleton was a baritone who played some of Rutland Barrington's parts in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas in New York. Celli was the father of the charming young actress Miss Faith Celli, and Standing himself was the father of several sons who have, most of them, attained distinction in various walks of life.

Standing's chief hold upon my affections consisted

in his unlimited repertoire of extraordinarily funny stories, many of them about Johnny Clark, the old comedian of the Haymarket Theatre.

Clark, according to Standing, had a cottage on the river, which he had enlarged by the addition of a dining-room. This he built at the far end of the garden and connected it with the house by means of a narrow passage, the walls of which were entirely covered with photographs and sketches of himself in his various characters. His great pleasure was to ask his friends to lunch on Sunday, take them down this passage to the dining-room, and draw their attention to the pictures. The way to make a hit with him was not to recognize their original. Clark would say:

"That's a nice picture, isn't it? Who d'you think it is?"

And if you wanted to please him, you thought earnestly for a moment and then answered "Julius Cæsar" or "Napoleon" as the case might be.

"No, my boy, that's me made up," was Clark's delighted rejoinder.

According to Standing, tradition had it that Albert Smith, or some other well-known wag, was lunching with Clark one Sunday, and after being shown the pictures and running the gamut of all the disguises, paused before a large landscape which was hanging over the dining-room door.

"Hold on," he exclaimed suddenly. "Don't tell me. I know. That's you made up for Windsor Castle."

Another story of Clark—I don't vouch for the accuracy of these stories, but they were Standing's—was that during a rather lean time, he and Harry

Ashley took a top floor in the Strand, and carried on business as photographers. Times got so bad and they so hungry, that they had to pawn the lens of the camera; whereupon Clark went off to have a good square cut from the "Rainbow" saddle of mutton.

While he was away at lunch, a sailor called at the studio and asked Ashley, who had been left in charge, to take his photograph. Ashley managed to get his money in advance, put a ginger-beer bottle under the black shroud which usually enveloped the camera, took "pictures" of the sailor in several attitudes, and told him that if he called the next day he would see the proofs. And what was Clark's astonishment on returning from lunch to find the lens which had paid for it redeemed and restored to its correct place. Needless to add, when the sailor came for his proofs, he was told that the pictures were failures and that he must be taken again.

Besides Miss Fanny Robertson, the two ladies in "Pink Dominoes" were Sybil Carlisle and Ellis Jeffreys—a circumstance which seems almost incredible, since both have remained young while I have become palpably older. In after years Ellis Jeffreys was my leading woman when I was a manager, and I was her leading man when she was in management. Others of the cast were Alfred Maltby and Sidney Valentine. The latter was the author of that fearsome document known as the Valentine Contract. I shall have more to say of Valentine later on, when the time comes for a reference to the Actors' Association.

My memory is more hazy about this particular period of my life than about any other. Event crowded on event, leaving little or no impression.

I was making headway very fast, and it must have been about this time that I met Penley again. He and I both played in a farce called "New Lamps for Old" by Jerome K. Jerome, in which Penley became imprisoned in a lift which persistently declined to stop at its occupant's desired destination. As he passed the scene on his ascent and descent, he would see the rest of the characters, husbands and other people's wives, in more or less compromising circumstances.

The chief value of the scene was Penley's face, for Providence, as Gilbert said, had been very good to him in placing his mouth under his left ear. But Penley was something more than a buffoon; he was an exceedingly finished actor, and could have played serious parts just as well as comic—but for his face.

It must have been about now that I joined Willard at the Shaftesbury Theatre—yes, it was at this time, for I remember that Alfred Bishop, who was acting with Willard, took my place in "New Lamps for Old" when I went to the Shaftesbury to play in "Judah." I fancy that this was the first of Henry Arthur Jones's plays that I was connected with. I knew Jones first as one of a select band who used to ride in the Row in the mornings. There was Henry Arthur Jones, Frank Lockwood (who was, like myself, a Caius man, but of a rather earlier period), George Alexander, Tree, Cyril Maude sometimes, George Giddens, and old Mr. Windham of Edinburgh, the best turned-out of all the riders in the Park. He used to ride a very smart pony, and I recall his intense disgust when a man came along on a flashy-looking Arab, which he took down the row in and out of the trees doing

*haute école* steps much more suitable to the circus than to his actual surroundings. Windham looked at him and then shouted to an imaginary friend on the other side of the Row:

"If it were my horse, I'd stop him doing that in five minutes!"

He was an extremely successful Edinburgh theatrical magnate, a partner of J. B. Howard. The Howard and Windham management is carried on still by Fred Windham, the son, whom I knew as a very young man playing juvenile parts.

Then there was Finlay, of whom Gilbert once said that he would be summoned for furious loitering; no one had ever seen him go faster than a walk.

I got to know Henry Arthur Jones very well, and used occasionally to have a day's hunting with him with the Old Berkeley Hounds (of which Harding Cox was at that time Master), and I played in several of his successful plays, among them "The Dancing Girl" with Tree, and "The Case of Rebellious Susan" with Charles Wyndham. "The Dancing Girl" with Tree was a very interesting business for me. I had an extraordinarily funny part, which got me more talked about than anything I had previously done.

After a long run in London, Tree took the play on tour, and Fred Terry, with whom I lived during the tour, was courting the beautiful Julia Neilson, the "Dancing Girl." He and I were old friends; we had met in the old days when I was playing with Ada Cavendish and he with Marie de Grey.

Rose le Clerq was in the "Dancing Girl" Company—she deserves a niche all to herself in any record of the contemporary stage. She was the *grande dame*



*par excellence*. Her part was a short one, but during the long run of the play, when we were all at times out of the bill, she was the only one whose absence made any difference—whose part became absolutely ineffectual in any other hands.

Tree at the time was contemplating his first appearance as Hamlet. We had a considerable difference of opinion as to my aptitude for the part of Osric, for which I was, and am, firmly convinced that there is no actor on the stage less suited. Tree insisted that it had always been the light comedian's job, and quoted many celebrated light comedians, such as Leigh Murray, in support of his contention. But after lawyer's letters had passed between us he abandoned his attitude of command, came to me quite frankly and expressed his hope that I would play it, as his first performance of Hamlet was an historical occasion for him and he wanted to be supported by all the members of the Haymarket Company. So of course I gracefully gave way.

This first performance took place at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, and I made my appearance as Osric, in a pink satin suit of clothes about two sizes too small for me looking like nothing at all, and very late in the evening in a front scene, with Edward Hastings (the stage manager) cursing and swearing at the stage hands who were making frantic efforts to set the final scene. My scene went horribly flat, and I, who had been making Manchester laugh all the week as Slingsby in "The Dancing Girl," went off the stage thoroughly angry and determined never to make such a fool of myself again.

The performance was followed by a supper which Tree gave at the Queen's Hotel. As I went in, I was

accosted by a little Yankee newspaper reporter, who asked me "on such an interesting occasion, had I anything to say that the readers of the *New York Herald* would consider of interest?"

"Yes," I replied. "You can tell 'em that to-night was Tree's first performance as Hamlet and my last as Osric."

The supper, however, was a very jolly one, and among the guests were the officers of the 12th Lancers. One of them, Colonel Atherton—Captain Atherton at the time—had been at Charterhouse and Caius with me, and I had been staying with him in Hulme Barracks where the Regiment was quartered.

They were all great followers of the theatre, and one night during the week the Officers' Mess invited Tree and the whole Company to supper, with the addition of Gillie Farquhar, who was staying in Manchester, invalided, at the time. He went to this function in the same cab with Tree, and they seem to have driven several times round the barracks, their cabman obviously having not the slightest idea where the Officers' Quarters were. At last Gillie put his head out of the window, asked an apparent sentry the way, gave the man a shilling, and was directed to the proper entrance.

When we were in the middle of supper, the Orderly Officer—I think it was Clifton Brown—came in after duty, very much delighted at having been the recipient of Gillie's generosity.

Gillie sat next to me at the Hamlet supper in the Queen's Hotel, and opposite us was the same little reporter whom I have already mentioned. Gillie was rather under the weather and sorry for himself, and sat with a mournful eye fixed on the newspaper

man's very Hebraic face. During an absolute hush in the conversation he said in a sepulchral voice:

"I hate Jews."

We kicked him violently under the table, so he looked up and became sensible of our horror at this uncalled-for expression of opinion.

"I didn't mean I hate Jews. What I meant was I hate Americans," was his hasty correction.

I remember meeting poor old Atherton some years afterwards, and asking him to have supper with me at the Green Room Club. We sat near to Jimmy Fernandez, with whom Atherton was delighted to renew acquaintance. Atherton was a typical 'plunger,' and with his rather heavy but genial voice, he said to Jimmy:

"Let me see now, what piece was it you took when Tree did Hamlet in Manchester?"

Jimmy replied that he had played the ghost.

"Ah yes," said Atherton. "Very good; I remember it quite well. Oh yes, very good indeed. But, you know, that Hamlet—well, that Hamlet's a rotten bit."

My success (!) in Osric was so pronounced that not only did I never play it again, but Tree cut the part entirely out of his future performances. And here may I give a little friendly advice to those younger than myself.

Do not play bad parts if you can help it. No part is really worth playing unless it is actor-proof. Good parts make good actors, and many of the critics, with all due respect, are incapable of distinguishing between the part and the actor. How often an actor is inordinately praised when the applause should really

be for the author, and savagely slaughtered when the boot is on the other foot and he is compelled to appear in a perfectly thankless part. Critics are a kindly lot as a rule, but I would ask them in criticizing actors to remember that the actor has to earn a salary and live, and does not choose his own parts.

A critic who was really a power in the days I am writing about was Clement Scott. He was rather prejudiced and bigoted, but he was a first-rate journalist with a real love for his job—which was to write of the theatre. The merit of his articles lay in his whole-hearted praise or blame. He was never afraid to pile on either, and Clement Scott's good word—which came from him more often than his bad word—was considered of great value by its recipient.

There were other doughty knights of the pen in those days—Moy Thomas, William Archer, Bendall and, last but not least, Joe Knight. Joe Knight was always the last, no matter how large the company, to go home to bed. When he came into the Club for supper, it was his habit to buy six cigars, one of which he used to place at a little distance from the others, with the inforamatory statement that "that one was for the cab." He was the most kindly of all critics, and whatever might be said about you in the majority of the papers, you were fairly sure of Knight's good word in the *Globe*.

He had a pretty wit too, and I remember his returning thanks for the toast of the Press, at a dinner which Sir John Hare gave at the Garrick Club. Comyns Carr had proposed the toast, and not being very fond of critics as a body, had said that "in view

of the damage inflicted upon the theatrical profession by the Press, managers should be allowed firearms with which to shoot the critics as they sat in the stalls."

Joe replied with perfect good humour that "he quite agreed with everything that his dear old friend Carr had said; but he begged him to temper justice with mercy and shoot the critics before they came into the theatre."

No doubt, criticism must be a difficult and in many cases a depressing job. Whereas in the criticizing of music or painting some technical knowledge is necessary, the drama is at the mercy of a number of men, some of whom, by reason of an educated and intelligent outlook upon the stage, are entitled to criticize; while others have no more feeling for it, or ability to write about it, than I have to attempt to instruct people in wireless telegraphy. The fact that this want of knowledge is so little in evidence is one on which the theatre—and by the theatre I mean both authors and actors—is a good deal to be congratulated. It has always seemed to me, in my humble way, that the whole business of criticism is slightly overrated both by the giver and the receiver. After all, it is only one man's opinion, and who shall say whether that opinion is of any particular value or importance? Criticism seldom or never affects the fortunes of a play, except in so far as it may hurry a great success, or hasten the burial of a failure.

After the run of "The Dancing Girl" began my long association with Sir John Hare. He was a supreme artist within his limitations. There are some performances one would like to place on a pedestal as things apart—David James's Butterman

in "Our Boys," Henry Irving's Wolsey, Joe Jefferson's Rip van Winkle, Ellen Terry's Portia and John Hare's in "A Pair of Spectacles." The last was indeed one of those indescribable pieces of perfection one can never forget; nor, for that matter, can one forget Groves's performance as The Man from Sheffield. There was an extraordinary intimacy in Hare's acting that made one feel about the characters he played, as one did about Anthony Trollope's personages, that they were one's old and valued personal friends.

Not the least lovable of Hare's personal idiosyncrasies was his very quick temper, which would flare up on the least provocation and die down just as quickly. We were playing in a play by Sidney Grundy and were rehearsing a new play by Claude Carton, called "Robin Goodfellow." Hare wanted me to do some business which I did not like, and after we had argued the point for a few minutes he danced on his hat and said I offered a studied resentment to all his suggestions. The result was the postponement of "Robin Goodfellow" until I had left his Company.

For a good many weeks we did not speak as we passed by, but it was impossible to maintain an appearance of hostility towards a man for whom I had the greatest affection and esteem. I wrote him, therefore, a letter suggesting that we might agree to differ on a matter of business without its making any difference to our relations outside. On receipt of this letter Hare rushed round to my dressing-room, said it was just what he had wanted to say himself, and shook hands warmly; and in the long engagements which followed, we never had any kind of difference.

Some time after this—after I had been a manager for a year or more—Hare suggested that if I didn't want to continue in management he would like me to go to America with him in the Robertson comedies. In accepting this offer, I put it to him: were we quite sure we should hit it off, in view of our previous experience? His reply was:

"You have been a manager since those days and are probably more tolerant of a manager's worries and possible irritabilities, and I have a considerably higher opinion of your powers now than I had then."

During the interregnum between my two engagements with Hare I was most of the time with Sir Charles Wyndham at the Criterion. I had been one of his most fervent admirers as a boy, and it had been my wish ever since I went on the stage to act with him. It is curious how events turn out; here was the fulfilment of my ambition.

No one who had ever acted with him could forget him. Full of individuality, he had a voice, a manner and a charm which carried his audience irresistibly. His personality was such that one never noticed what clothes he was wearing. Surely this is a high tribute to pay a light comedian, to be so fascinated by his performance that one forgets to notice whether he is wearing a suit of blue serge or shepherd's plaid. So many actors are remembered more in connection with their tailors than with their brains.

It was about this time—a matter of some four-and-thirty years ago—that I was married.

My wife, Miss Lucy Dowson, came from an old Norfolk sporting family, and I shall always doubt whether her father would have given his consent to



MRS FRED KERR

From a drawing by Albert Moore, A R W S





his daughter's marriage with an actor, had it not been that by an extraordinary piece of good luck, the first time I went shooting with him I brought off (more or less accidentally) a wonderful right and left, which evoked his hearty commendation and established me firmly in his good graces.

Besides being a sporting family, the Dowsons are a very artistic and musical race, and curiously enough, although they themselves had no connection with the stage, they became plunged into a very theatrical atmosphere; for in addition to one daughter marrying an actor, the eldest son married an actress. Harry Dowson was the husband of Rosina Filippi, a delightful soubrette at that time, now the unrivalled exponent of such parts as Juliet's nurse.

Fate decreed that he should be a brewer, whereas Nature had always intended him to be a musician or an artist. Owing to his love for good music he gave up playing the violin and studied the viola, that he might take part in a wonderful quartette which included Piatti and sometimes even the great violinist Joachim.

I remember poor Harry Dowson—alas, he is no longer with us—dining with us to meet Henry Miller, the famous actor from the United States, who was playing a season in London. Miller and I had met in the early days of Ma Bond, and our conversation became very reminiscent. When I had asked after some twenty people who were all, without exception, no more, Harry Dowson put in the laconic remark:

“Don't you think you could hit on somebody who is only dangerously ill?”

I believe this story appeared in a book written by

my dear old friend Weedon Grossmith as having been spoken by himself. He probably heard it from me, and repeated it so often that he grew into the genuine belief that it was really his. When one comes to think of it, this is quite a common experience.

I was married from the London house of one of my wife's sisters, Mrs. Richard Worsley, as she was then, who gave us a splendid wedding of the old-fashioned sort; and my father-in-law insisted on postillions. There was a big reception at which my theatrical friends mingled with my own and my wife's family, after which we went off for a four-days' honeymoon to the Isle of Wight.

While at the Freshwater hotel I saw another man with whom I had frequently played golf at Mitcham, staying in the place with an extraordinarily pretty girl. I thought it would be tactful not to recognize him under these circumstances. When my wife and I had returned home, I met him one day at the Golf Club.

"That was a devilish pretty girl you had with you at Freshwater," he said to me with a rather suggestive smile on his face.

"That was my wife," I replied somewhat haughtily. "I had just been married, and we were on our honeymoon."

"So was I," he answered.

Our tactful reticence had been unnecessary.

With my marriage, the first half of my life may be said to have ended. I look back on it with a great deal of enjoyment, and, in spite of my numerous shortcomings, with considerable satisfaction. It had taught me that where there's a will there's a way,

and that no one who had the will to work, and a modicum of intelligence, need worry himself about getting a livelihood. For, such as I am, I may truthfully say, "Alone I did it."

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CHAPTER V

TEMPORA MUTANTUR

BY this time I had really found myself, and was very flattered and delighted at being asked to give an address to the Playgoers' Club. This Club was then a comparatively new institution, presided over by my old friend, Edward Rose, the author of a great many successful plays and a very popular and genial member of the Green Room Club. I can recall saying in the course of this address words which seem so applicable to the present day that I feel justified in repeating them here.

Rose had asked me to be controversial.

"We like to argue," he said. "Actors are so guarded and polite that they give us nothing to think about afterwards."

On the strength of this invitation, and conscious of the feeling that the actor was nurtured on the tradition that constant repetition of other folks' words precluded him from having any voice of his own, that he was a machine with little or no power in the shaping of his own career, that he had to go on playing parts for which he was frequently unsuited in order to earn the small salary which was to keep him alive—conscious of all this, I took advantage of Rose's invitation and became extremely controversial.

I had a good deal to say about critics, and I urged

the point that the actor should be allowed to state his reasons for occasionally disagreeing with their judgments. I recounted how I once wrote to a very eminent critic (as a matter of fact it was Clement Scott, but I did not mention his name at the time) and told him that though he had a perfect right to his opinion of my performance, he was not justified in saying of the part I was playing that it was an "easy" one. I was called on to represent a poverty-stricken chemist's assistant in the depths of broken-hearted despair and afflicted with a stutter. Why a chemist, and why a stutter I never knew, but it was a serious part, and I considered myself perfectly justified in protesting against my critic's assertion that it was an easy one.

I was told I was wrong. "Never answer critics"—"Never quarrel with the Press"—"A fatal mistake for the young actor"—and so on. "Gentlemen," I said, "no critic has been more uniformly kind to me since then than that same gentleman, who, I feel sure, never bore me the slightest grudge for pointing out what I thought was a mistake in his judgment."

I said then, and I think still, that it is so easy to blame, so easy to reduce the nervous temperament of a sensitive actor—and no actor without nerves is worth his salt—to such a condition of misery and disappointment, that it is impossible for him to do himself credit.

I asked critics to temper justice with mercy, not to wring a man's or woman's heartstrings for the sake of a smart line, and to remember that praise is an incentive—a round of applause a tonic. There is an indefinable something which conveys sympathy across the footlights, and a good audience gets best

value for its money—for the audience plays an important part in every theatre every evening, and the better the audience the better the performance.

How often have I heard said, and said myself, early in the evening, "What a jolly good audience!" It is this kind of audience, not ashamed to be quiet when we are serious, not afraid to laugh when we try to be funny, that is the actor's best friend, the friend who encourages him to put his best foot forward, and makes the play go.

I do not wish it to be thought that I am advocating unqualified praise as the only acceptable form of criticism. There are times when an extreme of good nature on the critic's part defeats its own ends by being ridiculous, and I well remember a misguided young friend of mine who started a newspaper entirely on his own account and for the express purpose, as it appeared, for I never heard that it reached a second issue, of writing an elaborate notice of the first play in which I appeared at the old Court Theatre. He fell foul of the play. He didn't think much of Mrs. John Wood, who had made one of her most brilliant triumphs in her part, and he was positively rude to poor John Clayton and Arthur Cecil, my managers; but he found in my performance a revelation the analysis of which occupied several columns—the part, be it recorded, being several lines—and he sent this paper thickly underlined to every member of the Company, including Messrs. Clayton and Cecil, under the impression he was doing me a turn. I tremble to think what might have been the effect on my career of this misplaced friendship, had my managers not been Messrs. Clayton and Cecil.

I spoke, amongst other topics, of the social position

of the actor, on which a raging discussion was then taking place in the newspapers—a discussion contributed to by everyone except by the person most concerned, the actor himself. And I said it might be interesting to inquire the reasons for this apparent diffidence on the actor's part.

His extreme reserve, I still think, arose chiefly from two causes. Firstly, he dreaded the good-natured inference of his friends that, in stepping for one moment out of a groove, he was advertising himself, and secondly, that it was his business to try and please the public one and all, and therefore he must give a complacent acquiescence to everything that anybody chose to say about him.

But *tempora mutantur*.

And why not? Why should the actor be an automatic machine? Why should he not speak up for himself? Why should it be necessary to accuse a man of being pugnacious, swollen-headed, conceited, if he chose to defend his views even against those of his critics? It is writing down the critic as very small beer if his skin is so thin that he can't argue a question of taste, often an open question, without acrimony.

The time when this address of mine was given was a time when yellow journalism was first making itself felt. It lived on the gossip of the backstairs. What it knew—which was little—it distorted; what it didn't know—which was much—it invented: and I begged my hearers, when they started a crusade against bad acting, to include in it a crusade against bad journalism.

It seems to me, looking back, that times have not changed so very much in the theatre world; but in taking the actor out of his shell, I think we are in possible danger of rushing to the opposite extreme,



and of making the theatre the centre of a little mutual admiration society, presided over by the earnest student of the drama, and of forgetting the great public, our real masters, who come to the theatre to be interested and amused.

And, speaking of this great public, the real theatre-goer of London does not belong to a sect; he is quite a different being from "the earnest student of the drama" of whom we have heard so much. The earnest student, in addition to being a very superior person who takes no interest in flesh and blood, and considers nature as something beneath, not beyond, criticism, is usually a deadhead. However much we may have at heart the interests of art, don't let us quite forget to be practical; that no sound commercial basis can be established on the unaided support of the deadhead, and that the prosperity of the theatre must depend chiefly on its box office and the suffrages of the paying public.

Are we not all, actors, authors and critics, taking ourselves just a bit too seriously? In my opinion—and I have the courage of my opinions for what they are worth—the emancipation of the drama is bosh. Our best playwrights are lending themselves to the morbid theory that life is a mistake—that sweetness, beauty and goodness are undramatic, and that the drama of the future—and alas, the present—is to be nourished on studies of distorted minds and diseased bodies.

It is my firm belief that unless the brighter side of human nature reasserts itself, and that very soon, half the theatres in London will be shut up. What is the reason of the crowds that fill the cinemas night after night, while so many theatres are empty? It

is because the cinemas are bright and cheerful, and people want to be bright and cheerful after their day's work.

For goodness' sake, let us get over this craze for morbid realism, or whatever people may like to call it, let us leave off catering for the very superior person, before we have stranded ourselves high and dry on the summit of a pinnacle which the public will never bother itself to climb.

Let us be practical. Let us remember we must live and let live, and let us pray for the death and burial of the pathological drama before it has succeeded in killing the theatre. Let our clever men—and we have plenty—try to interest and amuse, and let us put aside the nonsensical cant which has almost humbugged itself into the belief that people will come to the theatre to be instructed.

How can the drama live without the public? And how can the actor live without the drama?

Comedy and tragedy walk hand in hand on the stage and off—both have their votaries, their public, their exponents—in many notable instances the best tragedians have been the best comedians, and *vice versa*. I am not extolling comedy at the expense of the serious drama. We all know how many women (and, I fancy, men too, if they would admit it) like a good cry; but it is the emotion, whether it be tears or laughter, that comes of human nature, human passion, that goes to make a great play, a great performance, that drew the public in its thousands to see Salvini's Othello, Bernhardt's Fedora, Irving's Waterloo veteran, or Jefferson's Rip van Winkle. Without an appreciative public, no amount of theory, no amount of condescending encouragement from the

superior person, can keep theatres open and actors alive.

It may seem that I am taking a gloomy view of the future of the theatre. I don't really. Times change, and go on changing, and fads don't last long. I fully believe the reaction is already setting in; it has been too short-lived a fad to be fatal, and it has not been altogether without its good effects. It has tended to kill the absolutely silly play, and has, perhaps, brought into the theatrical arena men whose brains will ultimately profit the theatre.

Many clever folk argue for the sake of arguing, but when they find no one to argue with, their theories die a natural death, and I, for one, think it very likely that the decadent dramatist will follow the example of the Pre-Raphaelite artist and find out some day that respect for the real in the conception of art does not necessarily involve the total eclipse of the ideal.

I do not approve of the theatre in general taking itself too seriously. I am rather inclined to think an ounce of practice is better than a pound of precept, theatrically speaking. I can't say I've much faith in theory, in comparison between this school and that, in whys and wherefores. I have a sort of notion that some of us can act and some of us can't, that the good actor of years ago would have been a good actor to-day, and the good actor of to-day would have been a good actor then. Acting must be like drawing or singing, inherent in the artist. Training, of course, we all want, but the training of practice, that gives us the mastery over the technique of our craft, is the only training worth anything. If a man thoroughly understands what he is saying, and why he is saying it,

and the exact value of the words he is saying, he is an actor, and needs no lessons in elocution. If he does not understand, and has no sensibility from within himself, no amount of teaching could make him more than a parrot.

I remember the editor of a weekly journal sending round the dramatic profession a series of questions—Did we act better before dinner or after dinner?—Did wine or beer agree with us best to act on?—What was our favourite play and favourite part?—Were we nervous?—Ought the actor to shed real tears? As if any of these things were of the slightest importance, or as if the public were concerned in anything but the result! Sensibility is the keynote of the actor's effects, experience the mainspring of his expression. He must surely be capable of feeling—even to the point of shedding tears—a scene of sentiment or pathos in which he is to move an audience, or of being amused with a scene in which he has to make folks laugh; but his experience and craftsmanship must keep his own emotions in check, and enable him, with the faithful mechanism of the artist, to pass on to the audience the sentiment which it is his business to convey. Suppose the actor to be shedding blinding tears in an emotional scene; the result would be no words; a general mix-up of wig-paste and spirit gum, and a sniff which would probably convert his tragedy into farce and render his emotion as ineffective as would be the comedy of an actor who roared with laughter at his own comicalities.

It is in consequence of my great dislike of theory that I always feel a little irritable when I hear mention of the old school of acting and the new. There is no old school and new school of acting. The drama

of the present day produces the actor of the present day, but if he can act, he would have acted equally well the drama of any other day. The old actor of to-day was the young actor of yesterday. It is the falsest perversion of logic to argue that because a man is good in modern plays he can't play Shakespeare, and that because a man is effective in doublet and hose, he cannot act in trousers or plus-fours.

An actor must play what he can get. His manager and his author decide these questions for him, and when he is asked to play a modern character in a modern play it is surely ridiculous to bring the manners of the last century with him—to walk upon the stage in a modern comedy with the sole idea of showing how well he could play Hamlet. But I strongly object to the conclusion, usually jumped at, that because he is good in a modern character he must necessarily be bad in an old one. It is his business to do his best with what he has on hand, and he has to play such parts as his good or bad fortune may bring him. The old drama produced a certain style of acting—it was written with a view to that kind of acting—it dispensed to a very great extent with accessories—scenery, elaborate dressing and mounting—it required a certain severity of diction and bearing, and encouraged broad effect; and the reason why we see so little of it nowadays lies in the fact that people in London don't seem to care much about it, which I think is a pity.

The modern drama sends us to the clubs, the drawing-rooms, the race-course, the streets of London, for our types, and the actors must go with the times. The modern drama provides actors with every adjunct and detail of appointment, and it would be obviously

absurd to see a man in the middle of an elaborate drawing-room scene declaiming, and flourishing his umbrella as if it were a sword. At the present moment the modern drama is the vogue, and the young actor is brought up on the modern drama; but it doesn't follow that, had he been born a hundred and fifty years ago, he wouldn't have been equally successful. It is a difficult question this, and it is hard to make one's meaning clear, but I maintain that the same gifts and the same temperament are necessary for the actor of each and every period of acting, and that the true artist should only concern himself with the faithful portrait of the character he is asked to represent at the moment. Natural acting, as we understand it, means the faithful reproduction of twentieth-century types, and the natural acting of years ago concerned itself only with types popular in those days. Shakespeare knew no twentieth century, and the manners and customs of those days were natural enough at that time; and you may depend on it, the most natural actors then were the best actors.

But if the public taste, as years roll on, likes its drama up to date, the actor must go along with it; and it should never be forgotten that to-day's modern drama will be old-fashioned in the twenty-first century, and that it will require a different set of manners from those which obtain now, and which will probably not be the fashion a hundred years hence.

The actor must go on; the public goes on and so will the drama, and the modern actor of to-day will find himself old-fashioned in his turn unless he keeps moving.

There are two curious kinds of bad actor. There

is the old bad actor, who will go on the stage to show the audience a picture of an absolutely modern man about town, and will speak in periods and try to convert modern slang into blank verse, and the young bad actor who fancies that because people don't speak loud in real life it is artistic to be inaudible on the stage.

One often hears it said that the great actor of the past would appear old-fashioned to-day—that we should probably turn up our noses at the old-fashioned methods of a John Kemble, a Macready, a Garrick, were they to reappear before us now. No more thoughtless or more ridiculous theory ever was propounded. Had these great actors lived now, or had they been possessed of everlasting youth and lived till now, they would have gone with the times. They were not old-fashioned in their day, and if they were with us now they would not be sitting at home with the ghosts of the past, but would be out and about, exercising their powers of observation, and bestowing their great gifts upon the twentieth-century drama. It seems only the other day that I was privileged to hear two great actresses speak upon the same stage. They were genuine links between the present and the past—Mrs. John Wood, the then modern actress, with her splendid voice and splendid method, her fine bearing and deportment, the grand example of an actress born some years before, who had gone on moving with the times; and Mrs. Keeley, a link further back still in the chain, who showed us conclusively that she too had not disdained to keep up to date.

There was nothing stagey, in the old-fashioned meaning of the word, in the matter or the manner of

Mrs. Keeley's speech, and I venture to think the old actor who disdains to notice the ever-changing customs and manners of the times, is a monumental fraud, little or no more entitled to be called an actor than his antithesis, the youngster of the day who thinks he can act without training, master the technique of a difficult craft without experience, practice, or study, and is a good actor because his tailor gives him unlimited credit.

In talking about acting, there is always a tendency to mix up good actors with bad actors, or, more properly, actors with impostors. "When is an actor not an actor?" my friend Nat Goodwin asked me years ago, kindly supplying me with the answer in the same breath for fear I should guess it—"Nine times out of ten." It may be, and doubtless is, difficult for the youngster who really means business to get practice and experience. But, failing the valuable experience of the old stock days and the constantly changing round of parts he was once called upon to play, the young actor must do the best he can without them. For my own poor part, whatever merit and individuality the public has been good enough to credit me with, I owe to an earnest endeavour to make the most of the advantage of a long connection with such fine examples of the link between the old school and the new as Mrs. John Wood and poor John Clayton, and to the stage management of such a master of his craft as Pinero. I may be forgiven this momentary allusion to my own merits; they are the one subject on which I can speak with some authority.

There was another subject which interested me then as it does now—the actor-manager. The actor-



manager of a theatre has in these days almost ceased to exist—to the great detriment of the stage. For he is the natural product of the theatre; when he has worked successfully to a certain point in his career, he arrives at a crisis in which he must be *aut Cæsar aut nihil*. I have found that actor-managers—and in my time I have acted with most of them, Wyndham, Tree, Hare, Edward Terry, Willard, Alexander, Clayton, Cecil and many others—never tried to squash me, and in their theatres was to be seen all that was best, dramatically speaking, in London. Surely no merely commercial manager has done for the stage what was accomplished by Irving, Bancroft, Wyndham and some of their predecessors and successors; and surely these men knew more about the theatre, in which they had passed the greater part of their lives, than the men who have come after them, and whose early days were spent in the counting-houses of Bradford factories.

The theatre may be undergoing profound changes; but while we all encourage progress, do not let us rush at our fences and assume that every change must necessarily be for the better. I cannot regard it as an improvement that a theatre should be controlled by a tradesman and not by an artist. True, there are many cases in which the tradesman's and the artist's temperaments have been united with the happiest results; but we should keep a watchful eye on these developments. Sometimes these changes of policy are mistakes which it is very difficult to rectify, as in the case of the two old gentlemen who had been at Eton together and at Oxford together.

They were inseparable, and settled down together in a comfortable country cottage, living their own lives,

absolutely contented with and independent of the world. One of them played the flute, the other the piano; both were devoted to cribbage, and life was a pleasant, lotus-eating dream for them—till one of them incontinently fell in love at the age of 60, and got married. The happy home was broken up, the married couple left for a protracted honeymoon, the forlorn bachelor went into chambers in town and took to whist at his club. On the return of the happy couple, their first thought was for the faithful old friend, and they asked him to dine. The dinner was excellent, milady put forward all her powers of fascination to please her husband's old friend, and when at last she set sail for the drawing-room with a playful, "Don't sit too long over your cigars!" the two old cronies were together once more.

There was a long pause. A glass of port was drunk in solemn silence, and Benedict, eyeing his friend a little doubtfully, said:

"Now old chap, you've seen her, I want your candid opinion—how do you like her?"

"Do you want my candid opinion?" said the other.

"Yes, old friend, your candid opinion."

"I don't like her at all," said the bachelor.

And the husband responded, "No more do I."

## CHAPTER VI

### OFF DUTY

I HAD other interests in life beside the theatre; I have always been fond of sports and games of every kind, although I was never much good at them. One of my chief enjoyments used to be watching first-class cricket. As a lad, I used to go to Lord's and the Oval long before the days of "mounds" and reserved seats. With a hunk of bread and cheese and a tankard of beer, or ginger-beer, or a fearsome concoction known as Hatfield (a mixture of gin and gingerbeer with all kinds of groceries and green-groceries), I used to enjoy my alfresco luncheon of those days a great deal more than the three-and-sixpenny cold salmon and pressed beef of the stereotyped lunch to-day.

Cricket *was* cricket in my young days; I don't think it is entirely because I have grown old that I notice such a change. The cricket of to-day seems to me a dreary business, the outcome of county championships, averages, and individual interests, which did not exist in the times I speak of. I used to take it as a personal affront if W.G. didn't get a hundred when I went to see him. As a matter of fact he generally did; but the disappointment when he failed to do so was as reasonable as it was intense.

He was, of course, the greatest cricketer of all

time, but there were other giants of the game—C. I. Thornton, the mighty hitter; a less known but perhaps even greater hitter, W. J. Ford; “Monkey” Hornby, Bill Yardley, of whom I have already spoken—men inspiring to watch, and an extraordinary contrast to most of the cricketers of to-day. These were all older men than I, but among my contemporaries were the Lytteltons, the Steeles, Bunny Lucas, A. J. Webbe, Stoddart; a little later Jessop and Ranjitsinghi—all of whom, in my opinion, are unequalled by their successors. I feel that I am becoming controversial again, but it bores me to death to watch a modern cricket match dragging its weary course through three days of maiden overs.

Where is the Eleven now that will compare with the Cambridge Eleven of my time? And how often does one see such a match as the Gentlemen and Players at Lord’s in the year when W. H. Patterson, Captain of the Cambridge Eleven, went in last for the Gentlemen with about 30 runs to get and a very short time in which to get them? In spite of being morally bowled by every ball in the first over he received, he stuck magnificently to his guns, succeeded in knocking up the required 30 with Fred Grace (W. G.’s brother), and so won the match amid excitement which I have only seen equalled (and I am doubtful even of that) on the day when England beat Australia at the Oval.

I recollect another match, when Kent was playing Surrey and was a tremendous lot of runs ahead on the last day. It was before the time when innings were declared closed, and the Kent Eleven were instructed to go in without pads, to hit, and to get out as soon as they liked. Frank Penn, the Kent Captain,

helped himself to a sixer off every ball of an over bowled to him by Jimmy Southerton and off the first two balls of the next over—and was then caught off another glorious smack which unfortunately just missed going over the heads of the field.

Surrey was put in to make three or four hundred runs in a few hours, and I remember Jupp, who went in first and was Not Out at the end of the day, being just as entertaining as if he had been scoring at a normal pace. His business—and he knew it—was to keep in at all costs; and Frank Penn had the whole Kent Eleven fielding round point and trying to pick the ball off Jupp's bat.

I suppose my fondness for cricket was hereditary, for my grandfather was Captain of the Surrey Eleven before I was born; and there is a legend in my family that he and his bailiff—a man called Searle, a professional cricketer—had issued a standing challenge to any gentleman and professional, to play a single-wicket match. This accounts, no doubt, for the interest I always took in Surrey.

One night in the Green Room Club, I offered to take five to one that Walter Read would make his century in the Surrey-Sussex match on the following day. Two men in the Club laid me five pounds to one. I went to the Oval, and just before Read left the pavilion I said to him:

"I'll give you a bat if you make a hundred."

"Why?" he asked. But I was not going to give the game away.

"Tell you afterwards," I answered.

"All right," said Walter, "I'll make 'em."

And he did!

My friends at the Club paid the fiver each with a

very bad grace, saying I was the luckiest chap that ever lived, and that although I had won the money I was an infernal ass to make such ridiculous bets. So I sent for Lillywhite's Annual to find out what the odds really were as to Read making a century against Sussex; and there I discovered that instead of being five to one against, they were seven to four on—a fact which I took great pleasure in bringing to the notice of my two victims.

I think that very likely our cold and dull summers have helped to make cricket cold and dull; but whatever the reason, the fact remains that it is dull nowadays, and I am thoroughly in sympathy with the people who clamour for brighter cricket. And that is my last word on the subject!

Without being at all a proficient performer, I took a very keen interest in professional billiards for many years. I suppose there have never been such fine players of English billiards as Newman, Smith and Davies, but just as W. G. Grace was a prince among cricketers, so was the younger Roberts among billiard players. Whether or not he would ever have been as fine a player as the three I have mentioned, it is impossible to say, for the game has altered, but he was a greater showman and far more delightful to watch than those who have followed him. I can remember his father, old Roberts, who used to play pool in Cook's Rooms in Regent Street, and I remember also a funny little Club in Maiden Lane where, on one occasion, I saw a billiard match between the great William Cook and another Roberts, Arthur of that ilk, whose stipulation, by way of handicap, was that he should be allowed to say or do anything he liked while his opponent was playing. He reduced

Cook to such fits of laughter that the poor fellow was totally unable to play at all; and thus Roberts, if I remember rightly, won the match.

In those days people used to bet a good deal on professional billiard matches. I once saw a match between Mitchell and Cook, when Ben Hyams, a well-known bookmaker of that period, who was sitting just behind me, laid me fifteen pounds to ten against Mitchell just as Cook had made a large-ish break and was some two hundred points in front.

Shortly after this, Mitchell got going, with the spot stroke and passed Cook's total; and as there was no apparent likelihood of his ever stopping, Ben Hyams, who had been watching in a state of great dejection, suddenly offered fifteen to ten on Mitchell—which I took. I then pointed out to him that he would have to pay me a fiver whichever man won, and as I was getting tired of the perpetual spot stroke, I should be glad if he would give me the money at once and let me go home. After a good deal of hesitation and bad language he did so, and I left Mitchell still at it.

John Roberts had discovered that the public were rather bored by the spot stroke, and he invented the billiards known as spot barred. And this game gave rise to a rather curious anomaly, that whereas he was undoubtedly the finest player of his day, he was not champion because one or two of his rivals, such as Mitchell and Peall, had continued to play the spot stroke, and it was still included in the championship game. I made a suggestion to Roberts, which I still think was very good and practical, that he should write a letter to the *Sportsman* asking the question: "What is ordinary billiards?" The answer obviously

was: A game of 100 up. He should then point out that the championship of ordinary billiards should be decided on the capacity to win the greatest number of games of 100 up. I also suggested that he should issue a challenge to all and sundry to play the best of a hundred games of 100 up each. This would have been a certainty for Roberts; but although he was very much bitten with the idea when it was put to him, he never did anything to forward it.

When I was married I was well on the way to being a golf maniac—so much so, indeed, that in the early days of our life together my wife used to complain of being a golf widow. She became more reconciled to the game, however, when I brought home a very beautiful old silver bowl which I had won in a competition at Ranelagh.

I had originally taken up the game when I went to stay with some friends in Gloucestershire. My host met me at the station, and as we drove along to his place I inquired the meaning of some little red flags which I had noticed enlivening the landscape. They, I was told, were the outward and visible signs of the Royal and Ancient Game, of which my host, Tom Stubbs, an old cricketer who had bowled for the county under W. G., was an ardent devotee.

All the neighbourhood used to come in on Saturdays to play for a weekly medal, and as my visit commenced on a Saturday, Tom insisted on my turning out after a cup of tea to play a round. He himself carried my clubs (which consisted of a putter and two old-fashioned species of battleaxe), started me with a handicap of 24, tee-ed up the ball, and commanded me to hit it in the direction of the first flag. Now this somehow did not appear to present the



slightest difficulty, and I hit a beautiful ball which landed plump in the middle of the green. I played like one inspired, and to cut a long story short, won the medal with about 16 strokes to spare—and from that moment was a slave to a game at which I got steadily worse during the month I stayed there.

A curious incident occurred during this visit. One day a tramp wandered in through the lodge gates, and inquired from some of us who were playing, who was the master of the place. Stubbs made himself known; whereupon the tramp pitched us a long story about his antecedents, finishing up with the amazing statement that two years previously he had been winner of the Open Championship. Stubbs put down a ball, handed him a mashie and said:

“If you hit that over the house, I’ll believe you.”

Without the slightest effort the tramp did what Stubbs had evidently thought he could not do. In short, it appeared that his story was perfectly true, that he had fallen on evil days, and that he was tramping his way from one golf links to another. His name, I remember, was Burns. Stubbs put him up for a week, during which he gave lessons to some of the young folks, and then sent him away rejoicing, in a new suit of clothes and with some ready money in his pocket. I never heard what eventually became of him.

Golf has been a godsend to actors, especially to actors on tour, for go where they will, they can always find links and Clubs whose hospitality is unbounded.

The curious facility I always had as a boy for acquiring games, not well but passably, manifested itself again in golf, which I played for a great many

years, but have been reluctantly compelled to give up of late.

My principal handicap was my temper. My elder daughter, when a child, was told by a friend that she was like me. She said:

"I don't know that we are very much alike, but both our tempers are swift."

We will say, then, that my temper was swift. It became a tornado on the days when, in common with most golfers, it seemed as if I couldn't hit a single ball. There is a libellous story told of me, which I declare here and now to be untrue, that on one occasion at Ranelagh I hit twelve balls in succession into the lake and then threw my clubs after them. With a feeling that was too deep for ordinary blasphemy I then apostrophized the lake (according to the story) with the words :

"You've got all my balls. Now you can have all my b——y clubs."

I can remember a wonderful four-ball match when I was acting in Liverpool, and was asked by some friends to spend the week-end with them at Formby. I arrived late on Saturday night after the performance, and found my host and my antagonists of the next day hard at work drinking port—which North-Country people seem able to do with comparative impunity. It was good old port of the Day & Martin order, and I was weak enough to join them—with the result that the next morning I could hardly see out of my eyes. Totally unable to touch breakfast, I wandered out on to the tee, where I found the other three as fresh as new-born babes.

During the whole of that round I only hit the ball twice. My partner was old Teddy Porter, an ex-

Lancashire cricketer who became a very good and a very steady golfer—as near as makes no difference, a scratch player. As luck would have it, he played the game of his life and halved sixteen holes with the best ball of our opponents. The other two holes were the scenes of my contributions to the game. At the Seventh or Eighth, having hitherto missed my drive and the ball with undefeated regularity, I proceeded to miss it again and hit it some sixty or seventy yards, strangely enough not into a bunker. I then took a brassie, hit it a tremendous smack—the first time, mark you, that I had hit it at all—and the ball went into the hole, thus making Porter and myself one up!

Porter heroically stuck to the one up till we got to the Seventeenth, where I repeated my earlier performance, except that my brassie shot, instead of going into the hole, only lay on the edge. Mine, however, was the only three, and we were thus two up and one to play. I question whether anyone else has ever been the means of winning a four-ball match at golf by hitting the ball only twice in the entire round.

At one time I used to play a good deal at Sheringham, where we took a fisherman's cottage for the summer months, I playing golf most of the time and my wife devoting herself to our then small children on the beach. The East Coast is quite amazingly provocative of liver disorders when one first encounters it, and I remember one of my opponents in the Formby match (Dixon, the Secretary of the Formby Club, and a very good player) arriving at Sheringham and leaving word with the steward that he would be grateful for a match on the following day. We

promptly made up a foursome for him, giving him as his partner George Bramley, the steadiest old golfer that ever lived. I played with Forbes Eden, whose handicap, like mine, was seven or eight. Dixon was in splendid form, and they won the match and their half-crowns by about five up and four to play.

Bramley, who was rather fond of winning, was very jubilant and Forbes Eden somewhat depressed at the result. But knowing the tricks of the Sheringham climate, it occurred to me that on the morrow Dixon would certainly be afflicted with a violent attack of East Coast liver; and I suggested a return match on the same terms and for double the stakes. As I had foreseen, Dixon was very bilious and couldn't make a decent shot, and we won very comfortably—and profitably.

It was at Sheringham that I did a hole in one for the first and last time in my life. And what was even stranger than my holing it in one was the fact that my opponent lost it in two. I have always been sorry that he just failed, for I should dearly have liked to hold the record of having halved a hole in one.

Among my sports and pastimes there still remains racing, for which that first bet of mine at Cambridge had given me a healthy appetite. I more or less abandoned the pursuit after my marriage, but before it there was seldom a day's racing within an hour or two of London to which I did not go.

I remember some old race-courses which have disappeared—that at Croydon, for instance, where I was once standing close to Dick Dunn, the bookmaker, when he was vainly offering 100 to 1 against a horse he hadn't been able to lay in the race in progress at the moment. I was watching the race through a

pair of field-glasses, and seeing that this particular horse was going just as well as any of the others on the far side of the course, I put a sovereign into Dick Dunn's hand.

"I'll take that," I said, without the slightest idea that I was doing anything clever.

The transaction was scarcely completed when the horse came in first; and Dunn's language, invariably highly spiced, broke all its previous records!

I remember Hampton, race-course too. I had a house-boat at Hampton, which I shared with poor Edmund Maurice, who died only a few days ago. On one occasion Nellie Farren was coming, to our great joy, to lunch with us on board. I took the punt up to Sunbury, where Nellie lived at that time, and was punting her down the river—a perfect vision of delight, in a pink muslin frock, with a very pretty parasol. Suddenly, as we passed the race-course—where racing was taking place at the time—an itinerant fruit-seller, his basket on his head, came to the edge of the water yelling raucously:

"Oo'll 'ave a blood orange?"

He nearly dropped dead when the fairy in the punt, in an almost equally raucous voice, completed his customary cry with:

"Hequal ter any glass o' wine!"

We used to have a lot of fun on the houseboat. For a considerable period Maurice and I were not on speaking terms, but used to leave letters to each other on the table saying at what time we wanted the punt or dinghy. Maurice had engaged a commissionaire as our factotum, and had apparently warned him that I was half-witted, or something of the kind, for the commissionaire never by any chance took the slightest

notice of anything I said. This reduced me to such a state of fury that one day I picked him up—he was a very small man—and threw him off the roof of the boat into the river.

I then realized that the man could not swim and had to jump in after him and fish him out!

In the lucid intervals when we were on amicable terms, we did a lot of fishing and spent a thoroughly amusing life. A carriage used to be reserved at Waterloo Station for Nellie Farren, Kyrle Bellew (then a very handsome and popular leading man), one or two others, and ourselves. Sometimes the railway officials had to—and did willingly—keep the train back for Nellie Farren, whose work at the Gaiety gave her only just time to catch it. Indeed, she frequently appeared with the collar of her ulster turned up, in order to hide the fact that she had not had time to remove her make-up. She got out at Sunbury and we at Hampton; then, no matter what the weather or what kind of clothes we were in (and sometimes there were functions in London which necessitated high hats and black coats) we had to punt ourselves over to the houseboat.

Once as I was punting in a high hat to catch the up-train from Hampton Court, a procession of barges came along the river—a procession which would have put the train out of the question if I had waited for it to go by. So I put on a tremendous spurt, and had almost succeeded in passing across the front, when the bow of the first barge caught the stern of my punt and knocked it clean round, sending me sprawling from one end to the other.

I picked myself up and began cursing the bargee for not having given an inch when he saw I was in

a hurry. But he was a stolid brute, smoking a clay pipe, and his imperturbable silence caused my language to become more and more—and yet more—lurid.

Then suddenly I saw a party of ladies I knew on the towing-path, to whom the whole occurrence seemed to have appeared a huge joke.

I turned and fled—I had already missed my train!

## CHAPTER VII

### I BECOME A MANAGER

WHEN I married, my worldly possessions consisted almost wholly in the prospect of playing with Wyndham in Henry Arthur Jones' "The Case of Rebellious Susan." I had settled the terms and, as I thought, the engagement before my wedding; but to my intense disgust, I was told on my return to town that the manager and author had reluctantly decided the part would not suit my personality, and had engaged another man to play it.

I remember writing a furious letter to Wyndham, saying that inasmuch as my personality was much the same then as it had been two or three weeks earlier, I could not see why I had ever been approached or troubled in the matter. In a very few days the reply came that a mistake had been made after all, and would I please call at the theatre.

Of course, it was quite impossible to maintain anything like indignation when one met Wyndham. He was charm itself, put the blame on the author (the author having previously told me that the decision had lain with the manager), and concluded the interview by saying cordially:

"Well then, that's all right. We did settle terms, didn't we?"

I am a bad man of business but, probably owing



to my legal upbringing, I have a curious streak of cunning where money is concerned, so I replied:

"My salary has gone up five pounds a week since we first discussed the matter."

And I got this increased salary, too; so I may be said to have come out of the fray with flying colours.

Poor dear old Harry Kemble was one of the Company. A truly amazing character was Kemble. An old-fashioned fellow, he looked more like a Conservative peer or a country gentleman than an actor. He was enormously stout, and his chief failing probably arose from the fact that having a tremendous neck he had also an insatiable thirst. At one time he had promised Lady Bancroft that he would in the future drink nothing stronger than claret. I went for a drive with him one morning in Edinburgh, and between breakfast and lunch he lowered five pints of claret—not glasses: pints!—which had no more effect upon him than if they had been five pints of water.

Stories about Kemble are countless, but most of them have been told so often that I won't repeat them again. This one, however, has possibly not been seen in print.

Irving and Tree went into the drawing-room of the Garrick Club one day, and saw Kemble, oblivious to his surroundings, reading the *Times* upside down on a lectern with his eyes closed. They proceeded to poke fun at the "Beetle"—which was his pet name among his many friends.

"That," said Irving, "is Kemble, a very clever actor."

"Yes," rejoined Tree, "full of individuality."

"Individuality," repeated Irving. "There's nothing so important in an actor as individuality."

Then the Beetle awoke. His head appeared slowly over the top of the lectern, and a withering sepulchral murmur came from his lips, as he surveyed the two, in his opinion, successful charlatans.

"Yes; but under control."

He it was who stood godfather to my son, and who, on the day of the boy's christening, sent round to my dressing-room a beautiful old silver mug and a Savings Bank book with £5 entered in it in the name of Geoffrey Kerr.

"To teach him thrift," he said. "All young people should learn thrift. . . .

"I never studied it myself," was his revealing and perhaps rather pathetic afterthought.

He also left Geoffrey £100 to be inherited when the boy came of age—a hundred pounds which, after lying at compound interest for twenty years, realized something over £50, owing to the War and its terrible effect on securities of all kinds. That was not the Beetle's fault, however. He died, and with him passed a very remarkable personality, a great gentleman, leaving a gap which has never been filled.

It was during the run of "The Case of Rebellious Susan" that Wyndham became very seriously ill. There was a scene in which he had to administer good advice to a young couple (Nina Boucicault and myself), finishing by taking us by our arms and sending us into the garden to think it over and make up our differences.

I became aware, as the scene progressed one night, that there was something wrong. He spoke his words with obvious difficulty, and as we came near to the climax, it struck me that, so ill was he, he would be unable to get up from the chair in which he was

sitting. So I went across, put my arm under his, instead of him coming to me, and led him off the stage. In the wings he completely collapsed.

A doctor was sent for, I made apologies to the audience, his understudy was found, and the play continued to its close. We were all terribly anxious about him; but the illness, though severe, did not last very long. His vitality reasserted itself, and it seemed only a short time later that he gave a tremendous performance in aid of charity, to commemorate his twentieth year of theatrical management.

He played Charles Surface, Forbes Robertson was Joseph, and others in the cast were Charlie Hawtrey, George Alexander, Cyril Maude, George Giddens and myself. We had to rehearse at midnight, for we were all playing at different theatres, and the rehearsals used to end with a very cheery supper in Wyndham's office at the Criterion.

Besides this performance, he gave a splendid party at the Cecil, then newly opened, and took my wife in to supper. When I reminded him that it seemed only a few days ago since I carried him off the stage, as I thought, a dead man, he said:

"I have discovered the secret of perpetual youth. I never take meals. When I am hungry I have something to eat, but I have entirely given up breakfast, lunch and dinner."

There may or may not be something in this idea. I do not know what the medical faculty would have to say about it, but it struck me that the average cook would raise difficulties which would make it more or less impossible for the ordinary man to follow Sir Charles' example. In his case, he had only to ring a bell and order a dozen oysters, or a cutlet,

or whatever he wanted, for his office was over the Criterion restaurant, and he would therefore have little difficulty in procuring what he liked when he liked it.

About this time I made my first incursion into management. Robert Buchanan—"the Bard," as he was always called—and Charles Marlowe (who was none other than Harriett Jay) had written a very funny farce called "The Strange Adventures of Miss Brown." I was sufficiently struck by its possibilities to take the Vaudeville Theatre and to produce it. I got up a small syndicate among my friends, and started with a good deal of hope—hope not altogether unjustified, since I had in my Company Miss Victor, a wonderful old actress, and dear old Lal Brough, and for my leading lady Miss May Palfrey, the charming wife of a very old friend of mine, Weedon Gro-smith. It was from him that I took over the Vaudeville. When he wanted the theatre back, I found other quarters at Terry's Theatre and I had to part with his wife as well as his theatre, her place being taken by Miss Eva Moore.

"Miss Brown" had a long and irritating career. It was produced at the end of June, 1895—which year happened to have an abnormally hot summer. We had a very good Press and the play itself went exceedingly well, but business fluctuated up and down with the thermometer, the result being that the receipts each week were only a shade over or under the expenses, and the play had a long run without making any profit worth speaking about.

It was handicapped, moreover, by its resemblance to "Charlie's Aunt." The hero (which I played) was a young officer whose fiancé was a ward in Chancery,

and kept at school by her guardian. The only way I could get near her was by dressing up as a girl, and smuggling myself into the school. Once I was in the building, the fun became fast and furious—and in short, the whole story made very funny farce indeed.

One of the biggest laughs I ever heard on the stage came on our first night. I had been so pushed during the production, looking after everything and everybody but myself, that I had not even put on the dress I was to wear as the schoolgirl. Miss Esmé Beringer, one of the other schoolgirls, had to take a violent fancy to me, and in the exuberance of her friendship give me a large orange. It had never occurred to me, at rehearsal, that there would be any difficulty in disposing of this orange—I had always fancied myself simply putting it in my pocket. But on the first night—to my great embarrassment—I couldn't find a pocket to put it into! As I turned up the stage feeling about for one, the audience began to laugh—and it struck me that I had accidentally hit upon a very good bit of business. The laugh culminated in a huge roar of merriment when, after I had found a slit of some kind in the dress and popped the orange into it, the orange came out bump on to the floor! I had, it appeared, mistaken the placket hole for a pocket—a mistake, I need hardly add, which I repeated every night as long as the play ran.

On the whole I made a fairly successful beginning in management with "Miss Brown." I followed it up at Terry's Theatre with a thoroughly delightful play by Madeleine Lucette Ryley called "Jedbury Junior." This had been played in America under

another title, and was warmly received by the London critics—the *Sun*, for instance, began its notice thus:

“Mr. Kerr is a lucky man. Not only is he directing the theatre in which ‘Sweet Lavender’ first saw the light, but he has produced a play that is wholly in the ‘Sweet Lavender’ vein.”

The two girls in the piece were Maude Millett and Eva Moore, the former as my sweetheart, the latter as my sister. And how good they both were! But I shall always think myself rather unfortunate in that this play, delightful as it was, did not, for some reason I am totally unable to fathom, have a very long run. Yet Sydney Grundy wrote me a letter in which he said that he had paid his money three or four times to see it from the pit, and that it was the most charming play he had ever seen—the play, in fact, which he had always wished to be able to write himself.

This from the author of “A Pair of Spectacles”!

I have often been asked: What are the essentials of a successful play? I can only answer that in judging a play one must ask oneself two questions:

“Is it interesting?”

“Is it amusing?”

If it is either of these, it is a good play; if it is both it is a very good play; if it is neither it’s a bad play. Unfortunately, in characterizing a play as either interesting or amusing the manager is apt to base his judgment upon nobody’s taste but his own—which may account for the production of so many unsuccessful plays.

In this connection I remember very well a play called “John Durnford, M.P.”—a clever play written by a clever man, Stewart Ogilvie. Both he and I

were thoroughly convinced of its prospective success; my Company, which was a very strong one and included Ellis Jeffreys as heroine, shared our sanguine outlook. It went very badly on the first night, however; and in the middle of the play I realized that it was neither interesting nor amusing, but that the story, which was very clearly set forth in the stage directions, all happened off the stage instead of on it. This is a rather common pitfall, very apt to entrap the inexperienced reader of plays.

Managers have many minor troubles—among them an enormous correspondence, most of which has to be answered. I had a stereotyped form of reply to many of the letters I was perpetually getting, such as those from actors wanting engagements, or from people asking for seats. On reading these letters I generally wrote A, B, or C on them, and put them into a basket to be dealt with by the office in the method prescribed by these initials.

I recall a letter I had about this time from a woman who peremptorily demanded a box for herself without giving me the slightest indication as to who she was or why I should consider myself under any obligation to give her a free seat. I therefore marked her letter with the initial which indicated a reply to the effect that the Management presented its compliments and would be glad to know on what grounds she based her application.

This brought me back several pages of virulent abuse. She informed me that she was an old actress, that I ought to be ashamed of myself for not having heard of her, that Irving, Tree and Alexander always sent her seats, that I was a young upstart and impostor—and a great deal more in the same strain. I

had nothing in my code of initials to deal with a situation of this sort, so I dictated an answer saying that, while I was obliged by her expressions of opinion, the fact remained that it was my misfortune not to have heard of her; and that judging by the tone of her letter the circumstance did not seem to call for any detailed expression of regret.

And there the matter closed.

Among other letters for which I had no stereotyped answer was one which I received from a schoolgirl, who wrote me from Norwood as follows:

DEAR SIR,

I see that the last nights of "Jedbury Junior" are announced and I feel sure you will have something you can give me. I am in a *fearful* box. I've to be sent to a "Ladies Boarding School" with a view to "finishing me off." So I positively *must* get something and *then* I can refuse to go owing to being "otherwise engaged." Mr. Kerr, for any sake help me out of the "Pickle" for I am nearly off my head at present with worry. Mr. Kerr, you *must* help me. Mother is away till Sunday and I will be in town on Saturday (to-morrow) so let me come and see you and then you can give me a *part*. *Do please listen* to my *entreaties*, and whatever you do (or don't do) *please, please* answer me. If you will telegraph what time you will see me I will defray the expense. Now I quite expect you to help me. You will, won't you? For to school I will *not* go, so you *must* help me. In haste,

Yours truly,

---

I could but ask the girl to see me, and I think



I advised her not to be silly, but to take her mother's advice.

Towards the end of the run of "Jedbury Junior," I was sitting in my office trying to make up my mind about a piece to succeed it, when I received that letter from my old manager, John Hare, to which I have already alluded, suggesting that if I was tired of management he would like me to go to America with him. This letter made up my mind for me, and I went back to America for the third time. This time I was destined to see more of it as a country, my previous visits having been only to New York.

Just before starting, we went for a short tour, and among other places, to Glasgow. Hare, who was very particular about his nourishment, solid and liquid, thought he would like to take with him to America a case of the whiskey he had always drunk at home, which was identical with that supplied to Queen Victoria. I think it was called "Robertson"—anyway, it came from a corner house in Sauchiehall Street. So while Hare was playing "A Pair of Spectacles" (in which I did not appear) he commissioned me to go to this shop and order a case packed for travelling.

I went down, and found the whiskey emporium to be a kind of dismal public-house. There was no one in it except an elderly man apparently doing sums in a ledger on the far side of the counter, who took no sort of interest in me.

I cleared my throat, but did not succeed in attracting his attention.

"I've come to order a case of whiskey—the same as you supply to the Queen—packed so that we can

take it on board ship. We are taking it with us next week."

All this he received in solemn silence. He continued to write, and in a kind of abstraction pushed a bottle across the counter to me, and a glass and a jug of water. Rightly interpreting this as an invitation to taste the whiskey in question, I filled the glass; and then I said:

"That's thundering good whiskey."

For the first and last time the Scot opened his mouth.

"The best," he said dourly.

He returned to the endless sums in his ledger, and the transaction was completed in unbroken silence.

We opened at the Knickerbocker Theatre, New York, with "Caste." Always popular in America, the play as presented by our all-British company made a tremendous hit. Hare's Eccles, while different from that of George Honey and his predecessors in the part, was an extraordinarily human and natural performance—he made you feel almost sorry for the tipsy little public-house loafer who had seen better days. The humour of the part, too, was brought out in a less boisterous but, to my thinking, infinitely funnier manner.

He reminded me of a real character I used to see in the old days when I walked home with Harry Nicholls from the Novelty Theatre, through Seven Dials to Bloomsbury. We used frequently to pass a dilapidated Eccles and his equally dilapidated wife, with whom he appeared to carry on a perpetual quarrel.

One evening, at the corner of Parker Street, Drury

Lane (where our stage door was), I overheard him telling his wife that "'e wasn't 'appy wiv 'er." The lady, a dignified little spitfire, drew herself up to her full height (which even then didn't extend above his waistcoat), and said in a tipsy but judicial voice:

"Not 'appy? You wus drunk Monday. You wus drunk Tuesday. You wus drunk yesterday, and you're drunk ter-day. What the 'ell more d'you want. D'yer want ter be a hangel?"

Just such a type as this was John Hare's Eccles—a real man in appearance, in manner, in every detail—a character that might have stepped out of Thackeray's novels, and one that would have truly delighted Tom Robertson, the author, had he but lived to see it.

Some of the old-timers, I admit, thought differently, but I stick to my opinion—and I have seen several actors in the part. Hare's original part was, of course, Sam Gerridge, which he handed over to his son Gilbert, and Gilbert made a very good thing of it.

Besides "Caste," Hare played "The Hobby Horse" of Pinero's, and "A Pair of Spectacles." I recollect a rather amusing thing about "The Hobby Horse," which had been produced by Messrs. Hare and Kendal at the St. James's Theatre when I was playing in "Dandy Dick" at the Court. Pinero had wished me to play the lawyer in "The Hobby Horse," but it was decided it would be better to leave me where I was. But when Hare revived the play for tour, I actually played the part for which I had been originally suggested.

I asked Hare if he thought there would be any objection on the author's part to my doing and saying a little more than was set down for me. Hare didn't

think so, but as Pinero was coming to see the Dress Rehearsal, he suggested that perhaps I had better tone down any extra words and business on that occasion. I didn't like sailing under false colours, however, and cracked my wheezes, and did my funniments with a rather anxious look out of the corner of my eyes at Pinero, who was sitting with an absolutely impenetrable expression in the stalls. He said nothing until the rehearsal was over, and then:

"Capital, old man. I didn't know there was so much in the part."

A cryptic remark which convinced me that, though he might not have liked my interpolations, he did not altogether disapprove of them.

While Hare and I were in New York we used to use the Lotos Club a great deal, a club of which Hare as well as myself became very fond. We always supped there after the performance, and were generally joined by that erratic genius Charles Coghlan. Coghlan—Rose Coghlan's brother he was—was playing in "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" with Mrs. Fiske. He was a brilliant actor, who did some things in his career that have proved almost unapproachable; but he invariably kicked away the ladder just as he was mounting its highest step. Early in his life he had made a very great success in America, but had left the country just before my first appearance there. Amazingly good company he was too, but his fondness for the extravagances of life—of which driving a four-in-hand was one—always outweighed his professional zeal, and he never quite occupied the position to which he was entitled. Yet on looking back, I cannot remember any other actor whose work was so universally appreciated by his brother actors.

I was more or less instrumental in getting him his engagement in "Tess." Mr. Fiske, my one-time Editor, consulted me about the part of Alec, which he had wished to offer me but which my present engagement with Hare prevented me from accepting. He asked me whether or no I thought that Coghlan could and would play it; I answered unhesitatingly that if he would he most certainly could, and that Mrs. Fiske would be very lucky if she secured his co-operation. Coghlan made a tremendous hit in the part; and as far as I can remember it was about the last part he played.

A fact which impressed itself on me again on this tour was the hospitality I received at the hands of clubs in the cities and towns we visited. I had with me introductions from my old friend John Drew, which procured cards for me from most of the best clubs. I was particularly struck by the Union Club at Boston which, together with the Somerset Club, seemed to me like two of the best London clubs transported overseas.

It was at the Union Club that Hare and I met a delightful man, George Gregerson. George Gregerson had been the intimate friend of the elder Sothern, whom of course Hare had known, and as two of Sothern's sons, Lytton and Sam, were friends of mine, Gregerson made us welcome and very much at home in the club of which he was one of the oldest and most influential members. Uncle George, as everybody called him, was very fond of Englishmen and might well have passed for one himself; but a dislike of the sea had prevented him ever making the voyage. Not so Mrs. Gregerson, who used to come over fairly frequently, and of whom my wife became a great friend.

I shall always remember the Gregerson ménage. Mrs. Gregerson came of an old family from the South, and their black servants were doubtless descended from the slaves which had been part and parcel of their household for generations. Such as they are dying out, both the old servants and their masters; America is becoming more cosmopolitan and less American, and I, who have known the country for so many years, see nothing but matter for regret in the change.

I have spoken of the elder Sothern. One of my earliest jobs on the *New York Mirror*, when as a youth I first landed in the United States, was to reproduce in a facsimile a sketch drawn by Sothern of himself. His son Lytton had chambers in the same caravanserai as myself in Duke Street. I was with him when he died. Several of us were sitting up with him, and I can remember his last words:

"I'm afraid I'm keeping you fellows up."

He died of what was then called peritonitis—it was long before Sir Frederick Treves' operation for what is now appendicitis. It was regarded then as much more serious than it is now—indeed, my recollection is that it was looked upon as practically incurable.

Sam Sothern, his brother, who died not long ago, a very popular man with multitudes of friends, became a good actor rather late in his career. His early days on the stage were spent mostly in America, where he was for years in the Company of his brother, the well-known American star, Edward Sothern. Sam was always fonder of horses than of acting, and I should have included him among the select circle that used to ride in the Row in the days I have spoken of.

There is also in Boston a quaint little club called the Tavern, which has an old-world atmosphere entirely its own; among its members are most of the younger brains of the City and many of the artistic set. It used to be a cheery place at the luncheon hour, and New York has developed the same sort of thing in the Coffee House. The Coffee House too is a charming little place, where everyone knows everyone, of which my son is a member, and where I am always made welcome on my visits to the other side.

Of clubs, American and English, I shall have a good deal more to say, however, in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AS A "LADIES' MAN"

HARE was very amusing in America, for he was essentially English and looked with a rather bewildered eye on some of the typical American customs we had to rub up against.

For instance, in America New Year's Day is, or was, considered of far greater importance than Christmas Day; most of the theatres opened on the latter day, and much to Hare's disgust we had to play two performances in St. Louis. We spent the time between the performances—Hare himself, his son Gilbert, Charlie Groves and I—in his room at the hotel playing Nap on his bed. Then we had a specially prepared English Christmas dinner—and I would rather not say just what the performance was like in the evening.

I remember so well Hare remarking one night as we left the theatre:

"Damn' good house. Let's have a bottle of champagne."

And on another evening in the same week:

"Damn' bad house. Let's have a bottle of champagne."

And half to himself, he added:

"I'm beginning to understand why Edwin Booth, John McCullough and all those big American actors took to drink!"



At the end of this tour, if I remember rightly, Hare took the Globe Theatre in London and did the Robertson plays. He also produced a play called "A Bachelor's Romance," which we had seen together in America with Sol Smith Russell as the star. I don't recall that it was particularly successful, but it gave Hare an opportunity of playing a part of a different type from those in which he generally appeared. The *Sporting and Dramatic News* of the day published a very good sketch of him with the words "Unexpected and welcome appearance of Mr. John Hare as Arthur Roberts."

But my long association with him was coming to a close. He was about to produce Pinero's tremendously successful play, "The Gay Lord Quex." It was always thought that there would be a very good part for me in the piece, but as the time drew near for its casting and production I noticed Hare getting a little uncomfortable; and at last he said to me:

"I'm awfully sorry, old man, but the play has panned out differently to what was expected, and Pinero hasn't been able to get a part for you in the scheme. But of course, it'll make no alteration to your engagement with me."

I was, I may say, engaged by him for the season.

Just at this time Wyndham sent for me, and offered me a part in Haddon Chamber's play "The Tyranny of Tears." I recollect Haddon reading me the play in his bedroom at the Cecil, and my extreme appreciation of it as one of the cleverest comedies I had ever heard. Wyndham himself did not very much believe in it at first—he said it was too slight—and when I told him that Hare would not release me

from my season's engagement unless it was for the season and not for the run of the play, he demurred. But my belief in the play was so great that I ventured a sporting offer.

"If you will give me five pounds a week more than Hare is giving me," I said, "I'll take the risk and come to you for the run only."

The play was a tremendous success and ran throughout the season; and I remember Wyndham, at the end of the first night's performance, saying to me with evident delight:

"Kerr, you've got me again!"

My great difficulty in this play was to add the few years to my appearance which were required to give verisimilitude to the supposition that Wyndham and I had been at school together. When, after a long interval, it was revived with Bobby Loraine in Wyndham's part, I had just as great difficulty in making my face young enough.

I shall always think "The Tyranny of Tears" about the best of the many good comedies I played in. Lady Wyndham (Miss Mary Moore as she was then) and Maude Millett were the two ladies, each of them admirable. Miss Moore was the tearful tyrant and Miss Millett the typically English secretary, Wyndham the husband, and myself his school-fellow and friend; and last but not least, Alfred Bishop who, as I write these lines, has just passed away from us, was the "old man" of the play.

We had a scene in which Wyndham and I breakfasted together in the garden on the morning following a rather hectic night. We were both of us supposed to be very disinclined for breakfast or for conversation, and our distaste for eggs and bacon and

tea or coffee culminated in our having a bottle of champagne. As we had to get through the bottle (and the palmy days of the drama were over, when one used to fling one's glass of ginger ale over one's shoulder and then drink from the glass when it was empty), we were at some difficulty to discover a drink which we could imbibe with a reasonable show of gratification. We hit upon a harmless and not very unpalatable concoction called, if I remember rightly, Sparkling Saumur. This looked quite like champagne, and was, in fact, an extremely colourless and insipid champagne—of sorts.

Alfred Bishop used to come on when we had drunk about three-quarters of the bottle and express severe disapproval of our habits—"Champagne in the morning! Dear, dear!" And as he was saying this, Wyndham used to push the bottle over to him, and Bishop would fill a glass and join in with a look expressing great outward disapprobation but secret enjoyment of champagne at that or any other time.

It so happened that one night Wyndham, feeling a little below par, or thirsty as the case may be, had ordered a bottle of real champagne. I noticed he drank his first glass and reached over for his second a long while before his proper cue came; then I tasted mine and immediately realized how matters stood. It was a very hot night, and Wyndham and I had entirely finished the bottle before Alfred Bishop came on. I shall never forget his face when he tried to fill his glass from the empty bottle and his look at the label, where instead of "Sparkling Saumur" he read "Pol Roger Extra Sec."

"The Tyranny of Tears," as I have said, had a very long run, and at the end of it I went to the

Haymarket to take Hawtrey's place as the Duke of Orme in "The Degenerates," by Sydney Grundy. This play was produced by Mrs. Langtry, who after the Haymarket run took it to America with me and most of the London cast; and in America we did an extended tour with it.

The title of the play had a sinister meaning for the American public—so much so that the Mayor of Detroit, assuming it to be an indecent play (it was quite the reverse), solemnly forbade its performance. We were at our wits' end to know what to do next; then it struck us that we were on the borders of Canada, and that there was a little town—I think called Windsor—just over the frontier and almost a suburb of Detroit. So we took the Town Hall in Windsor, and played there to an enormous audience, many of whom had come over from Detroit to see us.

At the close, so great was the enthusiasm that Mrs. Langtry was called upon for a speech. But she pushed me forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said, "this play, which has been successfully performed in England, was licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, who represents Her Majesty the Queen. I take leave to think that what is good enough for the Queen of England is good enough for the Mayor of Detroit."

A sentiment which called forth great approbation.

The tour included several weeks in Canada. It was just after the disastrous fire in Ottawa and we gave a special performance in aid of the sufferers. This was in Ottawa itself, and we were accorded a big supper at which most of the Canadian notabilities were present.

Mafeking night occurred while we were in Montreal. At concerts promoted by Mrs. Langtry for various charities, I had recited Kipling's "Bobs"; and on the night of the Relief, I was compelled to recite it in the middle of the play. The second Act had just drawn to a close, and I had had nothing to do with the scene, but the audience sat and called for me. So I went on and was greeted with shouts of "Bobs! Bobs!" After the performance I went to the St. James's Club and had to recite it again, standing on a billiard table and accompanied by bagpipes—the bagpipes having been obtained from a Highland Regiment quartered there, of which most of the officers were members of the Club.

I recollect a bagman, a fellow-passenger in the train on one of our journeys, sitting opposite to me in the smoking-room of the Pullman car and staring at me fixedly for five or six minutes. Then he said:

"Say, ain't you one of the Langtry troupe?"

I hate being addressed by perfect strangers, and replied:

"No."

He then said: "Ain't your name Kerr?" (pronounced Curr).

Again I said: "No."

To which he answered "Oh."

A little time after this I rejoined Mrs. Langtry, and my friend of the smoking-room, when he came upon us sitting together, looked more puzzled than ever at the resemblance. I have often wondered whether he has found out his mistake.

Nothing particular happened on this tour except a disagreeable episode with a scurrilous newspaper

in Philadelphia—a row which we won all along the line with the aid of Gordon Bennett, the influential Editor at that time of the *New York Herald*. He promised to print in the columns of his own organ a letter which I had written to the Philadelphia "muck-heap" protesting against its attitude in a certain matter; and by this means he forced the Philadelphia paper to publish it also. Clement Scott, at that time Dramatic Critic of the *Herald*, took up the cudgels, pronounced the curse of Richelieu on the Philadelphia paper, and commended us to Heaven as only he knew how to do.

At this period of my career I went through the same experience as most other actors who are what is termed leading men; it was generally my fate to support an actress. And now it was my good fortune to play with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in a piece called "Mr. and Mrs. Daventry." This was by Frank Harris, though Oscar Wilde was generally supposed to have had something to do with its inception. It was a very powerful but unsavoury play, which dealt with a neurotic wife's dislike for a full-blooded and rather brutal husband. I do not know whether it says much for human nature, but the fact remains that the audience was inclined to take the husband to its heart—merely, I think, because there was a good deal of comedy in the part. I am quite sure it had never struck Mrs. Campbell that there could be any sympathy with such an out-and-out black-guard as Daventry, but she had overlooked the undoubted fact that the world at large prefers full-blooded viciousness to æsthetic neurosis. She gave a wonderful performance, but I shall always think that she made a mistake, not in her portrayal of the

character, but in her estimate of the effect it would have upon the audience.

I played a good deal with Mrs. Campbell, and we always remained friends in spite of occasional differences of opinion. If she had been as good a judge of what was marketable as she was of what was merely artistic, her tremendous abilities—which made her the natural successor of Bernhardt and Duse—would have placed her beyond the necessity of playing such parts as actresses in general are obliged to play. No actress now on the stage has equalled, or indeed approached, Mrs. Campbell's performance in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" or in "Magda"—in both of which plays, by the way, I had the pleasure of supporting her on one of her American tours.

Two of the actors who played in "Mr. and Mrs. Daventry" have become very prominent since those days. The first is Gerald du Maurier, the second George Arliss. Both younger actors than I, they are now, the one practically at the top of the ladder in England, the other a most successful American star—which, when one comes to think of it, is a tribute to Mrs. Campbell's prescience in recognizing their abilities before the rest of the world had done so.

While I was with Mrs. Campbell, an action was brought against her by Granville Barker in which I was called as an expert witness on the question of whether, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary, a fortnight's notice on either side was the custom of the profession. A very self-satisfied young barrister was cross-examining me and became extremely offensive in his attitude.

"Really, Mr. Kerr," he blustered, "do you wish us to believe that at the present day it is possible for

actors to appear in leading parts in London theatres without definite engagements?"

"Quite possible," I answered.

With a look round the Court which conveyed the impression that he had at last succeeded in exposing a hardened criminal, he thundered:

"Give me an instance."

"Myself at the present moment," was my gentle rejoinder.

I find it quite impossible to preserve anything like a chronological sequence of my doings of five-and-twenty years ago. But that is, after all, of little importance; what really does matter is that I was very fortunate about this time in getting a lot of good parts, for which I received more credit than was, strictly speaking, due to me.

Among other things I produced for Tree a triple bill at Wyndham's Theatre, which he had taken for Mrs. Tree. It was an extremely interesting triple bill, the *pièce de résistance* being a French play, "L'Énigme," by Paul Hervieu, called by us "Which?" The play dealt with the love affair of one of the wives of two brothers, and the question to be solved was, which one?—hence our title. But the Lord Chamberlain, for some reason best known to himself, objected to the title, and also to the play, and it was only by emasculating both that we were allowed to perform it. When I think of the plays that are done now, it seems incredible that a real work of art like "L'Énigme" should have to be hacked about before it could be licensed. The censorship has, however, improved with the times. In these days a play is seldom banned except for some very good reason, and the ban is always lifted whenever the Censor



can see his way to do so, but a quarter of a century ago the Censorship was a far more bigoted business, which might have been presided over by Chadband himself.

Chadband having effectually spoiled the play, "L'Énigme" was in due course produced as "Cæsar's Wife"—a title (later used by Somerset Maugham for a different play altogether) which entirely misconstrued the real meaning of the author—the riddle—Which? I hope, by the way, it does not appear from my experiences with "The Degenerates" in America and "L'Énigme" in England that I was a disciple of an advanced and highbrow school of drama. Nobody hates indecency on the stage more than I do, but in avoiding it one need not necessarily turn the theatre into a kindergarten, or shut one's eyes to the fact that human nature is human nature, and that what concerns human nature is the obvious and natural subject for a stage play.

An extraordinarily clever situation formed the backbone of "L'Énigme." The scene was an old French château, a shooting-box in which two brothers lived each with his wife. They occupied the only four bedrooms in the château itself. Guests staying in the house were accommodated in an annexe, and on a certain night the brothers had risen in the early hours to meet their gamekeeper and try to catch some poachers. As they came one after the other from their rooms down the dark staircase into the hall, a third figure was seen to be with them—a man caught in an unpremeditated trap—a guest. As all the guests occupied not the château but the annexe, it was plain that he could only have come from the room of one of the wives: the question was "which?"

It is almost inconceivable that the Censor should have found in this situation a menace to the moral well-being of the British public. But he did, and we had to suffer the conversion of this interesting and intensely dramatic play into a commonplace domestic drama to appease his susceptibilities.

But speaking generally, we may think ourselves fortunate in having a Censor, instead of being at the mercy of Vigilance Committees and the police. In America, if an actor plays in a play which offends a police inspector, he is liable to imprisonment. Every inducement in the shape of enormous salary and so on is offered him to play in it, and he falls into a trap which could not have been set for him in England; for in England that kind of play would not in the first instance have received the Lord Chamberlain's licence.

As long as we have a sensible man who is in sympathy with the stage, like our present Censor, I think it would be a great pity to abolish the office, as so many people are fond of advocating.

After the triple bill, I was invited by my old manager, Edward Terry, to produce and play in a piece of Basil Hood's called "My Pretty Maid." This was a rather charming affair, with a good part for Terry and a good part for me. Also in the cast was an actor who has made great headway since those days—Dennis Eadie, who was then just beginning to come to the front as an eccentric character actor. I had first encountered Eadie when, as a prominent amateur, he had played a leading part in a play called "John Lester, Parson," which was produced at a special matinee at the Lyric Theatre and was written by my brother, the Master in Chancery, and

Roy Horniman, under the pseudonyms of Knight Rider and Layton Foster.

Since writing the above, Eadie has died, a man in the prime of life, successful and popular. The pity of it!

Then came a play by George Hawtrey, Charlie's brother, called "Lord of the House," in which I played a capital part of the kind usually associated with Wyndham in his younger days, and which at that time generally fell to the lot of Hawtrey or myself. I shall always think that George had written it for Charlie, for the *Daily Chronicle* in its criticism said:

"Mr. Fred Kerr, in what promises at first to be a good Charles Hawtrey part, saunters along in his imperturbable, bland, gentlemanly way, always refreshing, and always amusing to watch, though never anything but his own self. He is an excellent substitute for Mr. Charles Hawtrey, but all the time one cannot help wondering what would happen if for a moment either of them attempted to do what is the real test of an actor, and put on the personality of someone else."

This brought forth a letter, signed J. D. Beresford, protesting against the criticism and declaring that "only a few weeks ago Mr. Kerr was acting the part of an elderly Frenchman in 'Cæsar's Wife,' and that nobody who witnessed his exceedingly clever rendering of that part would accuse him of never being anybody but his own self on the stage."

Nina Boucicault played opposite to me, and there was a wonderful "old woman" part played by Mrs. Calvert, another link with former days, and a splendid actress who had moved with the times, and was as modern in her methods as any of the rest of us.

Next I found myself at the Comedy Theatre under Frank Curzon's management in a not very good play, "Secret and Confidential"; besides myself, there were Miss Gertrude Kingston and Aubrey Smith.

Aubrey Smith is an old Carthusian. We old Carthusians had rather a strong team on the stage at that time: there was Forbes-Robertson, Charlie Allan, Cyril Maude, Aubrey Smith, and myself, not to mention one or two clever amateurs, such as Lord Baden-Powell, who would probably have been a successful actor if he had not been a successful soldier and the founder of the Boy Scouts. Together, we gave a performance of "The School for Scandal" at the Haymarket, for an old Carthusian charity, in the days when it belonged to Cyril Maude and Fred Harrison, and I don't know any other school that could have produced so fine a cast. And one of us was seconded by an extraordinarily clever wife, Winifred Emery (Mrs. Cyril Maude), who was the Lady Teazle.

Everyone knows Aubrey Smith as a good actor, but not many of the present generation know him as I did, for a very good fast bowler. He was in the Charterhouse and Cambridge Elevens, and was quite one of the first cricketers of his day.

## CHAPTER IX

### OLD FRIENDS

IT seems terribly hard to write a book of reminiscences without making it pan out like a diary, and I am beginning to lose interest in myself in the memory of the many people I have met, some of whom were distinguished and all of whom were interesting—to me at least.

I have spoken of most of my old managers, but there were others besides my managers with whom I came a great deal in contact. For instance, William Terriss.

Terriss was a law unto himself. Exceedingly popular with all his brother actors, he possessed a verve and a dash upon the stage which have never been excelled, nor perhaps even equalled. To hear him declaiming some of the balderdash which was put into his mouth by Pettitt and Merritt, the great melodrama purveyors of those days, was to make understandable the growing difficulty of procuring satisfactory domestic servants, as Pinero put it after spending an evening at the Adelphi.

He was a thoroughly good-hearted fellow, and would do anything short of committing an actual crime to help a pal in an emergency. He came out to America at the time when I was playing in "Bootles' Baby," and being a friend of mine and anxious that I should stay in New York, he solemnly declared to

Augustin Daly that I was the one actor in the world to play a certain part in the piece he was producing—a part played very successfully in London by James Fernandez, who had not a single attribute in common with myself. This, however, did not bother Terriss in the least—he would have suggested me, with just as great an apparent belief in my suitability, for the part of Little Lord Fontleroy.

Like Edward Terry, he had an undeserved reputation for carefulness in pecuniary transactions, and I remember him once championing the cause of an actor to whom Fortune had not been too kind.

"Well, they may say what they like about him," declared Terriss. "I've always found him a very good fellow, he's never tried to borrow any money from me."

Upon which, Harry Hamilton, of the caustic tongue, chipped in:

"That doesn't prove more than that he is a judge of character."

It was this same Harry Hamilton who once "took a rise" out of Wyndham. Wyndham, who was playing David Garrick at the time, was sitting one day at the Green Room Club in the chair that had belonged to Garrick himself.

"You get more like Garrick every day, Wyndham," said one of his admirers.

"And less like him every night," exclaimed Hamilton.

Harry was one of the most incomprehensible characters that ever lived. Brilliantly clever, he could not resist saying and doing things which militated against his popularity. He got himself extremely disliked in America by hanging the Union

Jack on his wall and using the Stars and Stripes as a hearthrug. He was the author of many clever plays, and when I first met him was playing a small part at the Royalty Theatre in the days of Miss Kate Lawler.

With him in the same Company was Cecil Raleigh, a gentleman rider, the son of Frog Rowlands, the well-known trainer of race-horses. The friendship between Hamilton and Raleigh resulted in a collaboration which produced several successful plays. Raleigh, whose inventive power was perhaps the stronger of the two, later became a popular writer of melodrama, "The Whip" being about the best known of his efforts.

Poor Terriss, on the night when he was stabbed, had been playing poker in the Green Room Club until five minutes before the tragedy took place. I shall never forget going round as usual to the Duke of York's Theatre, where I was playing at the time, and being greeted with the report that Terriss had been murdered. I did not in the least believe it, but attributed it to his well-known faculty for advertisement.

"That's just like Bill," I remarked casually.

At that moment a man came in, very white and with a look of horror on his face, declaring that he had himself seen Terriss stabbed at the stage door of the Adelphi, and that rumour ran that he was dead.

Actually, of course, the murder had been committed by a crazy fellow who had been a super at the Adelphi, where Terriss was leading man, and who had nursed a delusion that their positions ought to have been reversed. The news of poor Terriss's

murder went round all the theatres like wildfire, and it was never more difficult for London actors—who were almost without exception his friends—to get through their parts.

He was terribly missed by all of us for a long time. One of the newspapers had the bad taste to comment on the attitude of a lady at his funeral, a lady who had been a personal friend of his. This drew from Charlie Brookfield a letter of protest.

“Providence in its infinite wisdom has denied certain senses to certain peoples—to the negro smell, to the journalist taste.”

Brookfield had a great deal in common with Harry Hamilton, inasmuch as he was quite incapable of keeping in check his habit of saying smart things without considering their possible effect. His father and mother were both distinguished and clever people, and he inherited their talents, but he always remained something of an amateur on the stage, and his performance of big parts never fulfilled the expectations which had been aroused by his beginnings.

Once he took the Haymarket Theatre for a summer season from the Bancrofts, and on returning it to them in the autumn he rejoined their Company. Some of the Company were always paying Mrs. Bancroft (as she was then) fulsome and extravagant compliments on her appearance—which I am sure Mrs. Bancroft, with her divine sense of humour, did not fail to appreciate at their proper worth.

“What beautiful hair you have, Mrs. Bancroft,” exclaimed a gushing young worshipper one day. It was a hot day, and Brookfield was standing by, mopping his exceedingly bald head.

“My hair was very much admired when I was in



management here in the summer," was Brookfield's pleasantly expressed comment.

And this brings me to E. J. Odell, another member of the Haymarket Company, who died the other day considerably over ninety years of age, and whose later years were spent as a "codd" at Charterhouse. How well I remember the "codds," as we used irreverently to call those old pensioners in my early days at the school. Another old actor besides Odell found his way there in his old age—Joe Cave, at one time manager of the Marylebone Theatre, whom the gallery, much to his indignation, would never take seriously.

He dearly loved playing the pathetic father in melodrama; but though his abilities in this direction were considerable, they were very secondary to his gifts as a dancer. On one occasion when he was shedding real tears over the fate of his daughter who, having been seduced by the Squire's son, had found a watery grave by throwing herself headlong from Waterloo Bridge, a voice came from the gallery:

"Orn pipe, Joe."

At the end of Cave's theatrical career he was given a benefit—I think at Drury Lane. I forget what the play was, but I had to take the part of a youthful desperado who shot Joe in the last Act—an episode which more or less brought the play to a close. It happened that my pistol obstinately refused to go off. After some six or eight abortive efforts at firing it, I went across the stage to Cave, who was poking a fire with his back to me, and pretended to strike him violently on the head with the butt end.

"For God's sake, die!" I kept hissing into his ear.

But Cave was very deaf, and looked at me in a

bewildered sort of way, his whole face a note of interrogation. At long last the predicament we were in seemed to strike him; he sank slowly backwards and gave up the ghost—to my immense relief. The curtain came down amid great applause, and I really think we got credit for the performance of a most original and effective death scene.

There have been a great many stories told about Odell. I seem to remember that most of them appeared in Brookfield's book. But one characteristic effort of his concerned me personally, and though I have told the story a good many times I do not think it has ever appeared in print.

One day I went into the Gaiety Bar (a stronghold of the thirsty actor of years ago) and there I found Odell, who graciously invited me to have a drink.

"Thank you," I said, rather flattered at the great man's condescension (and Odell was a very great personage to us young folk), "thank you, I'll have a small whisky and soda."

Odell turned towards a barmaid, who was deep in intimate conversation with a Corporal in the Life Guards several yards away.

"A small whisky, if you please, Miss, and a small bottle of soda-water for my friend here," insinuated Odell gently.

She didn't take the slightest notice, but continued her flirtation with the Guardsman.

Odell repeated the request with a slight additional emphasis.

Still no notice.

A third time, more suave than ever, but with a slight accession of—one could hardly call it irritability—Odell said:

"A small whisky and a small bottle of soda-water, if you please, Miss."

When this performance had been gone through several times more, the lady left the Lobster, and bestowing an opulent but artificial smile upon us, inquired loftily:

"I beg your pardon?"

Very gently Odell repeated yet again:

"A small whisky and a small bottle of soda-water, if you please, Miss."

And in the same gentle voice but a trifle louder, he added, "In my time they employed such pretty girls here."

Odell was something more than a personage, he was an institution; and it will be a long time before the Savage Club becomes reconciled to his loss.

James Blakeley was another curiosity of that time. He was a wonderful comedian, and for years the chief mirth-provoker at Wyndham's theatre, the Criterion. George Giddens used to tell a story of Blakeley, how after an uncomfortable voyage to America (it was rough, and he was a bad sailor) he was greatly annoyed by the United States' Customs officials. After a pretty harassing examination, he was put into a two-horsed cab with his luggage and driven out of the Customs House in a state of bewilderment and silent rage. Driving away from the dock, the cab bumped against a telegraph post and then ricocheted into an ash barrel, throwing him from his seat on to the floor.

He looked over to Giddens, who was also on the floor, and in an indescribable voice remarked:

"There! I told you I should never like the b——y country!"

He had a worthy successor in his son, poor little

Jimmy Blakeley, who was once under my management at the Court Theatre and who died a comparatively young man, leaving behind him a great many friends to mourn the loss of his whimsical and lovable personality. Incidentally, I think he used to get more angry when playing golf than even I did!

Giddens too was a very popular and a very good actor, who made his chief successes with Wyndham, and who was afterwards a member of my Company when I had the Court Theatre. In his later years he became a Christian Scientist, and however much one may disagree with Christian Science, one cannot help feeling a certain respect for it when one sees—as I have done on several occasions—the extraordinary effect it has upon its disciples, in keeping them at peace and unafraid at the approach of death. Poor George, when I saw him last, was lying at death's door in a New York hotel; yet he could speak of his probable passing merely as if he were going away for a week-end.

Most of these old friends are dead! Willie Elton, the comedian of my first theatre (Wallack's), died in New York when I was there years afterwards. He had always been a rolling stone, and had moved from London to New York, from New York to Melbourne, then back to London, and then to New York again—so that, while there was no question of his great ability, he never got a hold on his public sufficient to give him the position he was entitled to, or to enable him to put by money for a rainy day.

I remember going into the Lambs' Club one evening, only to learn from Frank Worthing, another English actor whom New York adopted, that Willie was upstairs practically dying. We and his friends

of the Lambs' Club managed to send him back to England, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he died among his own people.

His son George, who carries on the true Elton tradition, is an excellent actor who was my partner in what was perhaps the funniest scene I ever played in—the last Act of "Nurse Benson." Elton and I were two old men; we had a magnificent scene in which we were absolutely at cross-purposes and without the slightest idea what the other was talking about, which used to make the audience hysterical with laughter—and this at the time in the evening when most plays are over.

There seems no end to the people—not very distinguished, most of them perhaps, and rapidly being forgotten—of whom I should like to speak. Eben Plimpton, the American actor, for instance, an amazing fellow in his way, and a remarkable actor. Like Herman Vezin, he rather prided himself on his elocutionary powers. During the rehearsals of "The Garden of Allah" in New York, he went up to its author, Robert Hichens.

"Mr. Hichens," he said, "I have always been noted for the correctness of my pronunciation. I should like to have it from you that my pronunciation of these Arabic names is as it should be. For instance, Biskra—Bis-kra—is that how you would wish it said?"

"Certainly," answered Hichens, unmistakably appreciative of Plimpton's love of accuracy.

"And Benimora—Beni-Mora—is that correct?"

"Perfectly," replied Hichens.

"It reminds me of one of Klaw and Erlanger's advance agents," commented Plimpton.

"The Garden of Allah" was, as is well known, an

enormous success, Lewis Waller being the original actor of the principal part. I remember one awful mistake in the New York production which practically spoiled the evening when I saw the play there. The last Act depicts the monastery to which the hero is returning. The audience was wound up to the highest pitch of interest and tensivity, when the monastery gates opened and a party of monks came out. But instead of men with beautiful faces, which would have preserved the atmosphere in which we had been bathed throughout the evening, there walked on to the stage some figures resembling gargoyles—so dreadfully ugly that they made it almost impossible for one to take them conceivably as kindred spirits of poor old Lewis Waller with his impressive and ascetic countenance. It was a mystery to me that those responsible for what was in most respects a very fine production had not realized that this scene called for beauty throughout, and not merely in its painting and its leading exponents, or that the monks, horrible and even comic in their appearance, were calculated to make the audience laugh instead of cry. There are many plays in which atmosphere is the most vitally important thing to keep in view—a fact which Irving, Edwin Booth, Tree, Wyndham, Alexander and most of the great producers of my time never for a moment lost sight of.

I have not yet spoken of one of the most interesting men I ever knew: Charles Frohman. He was the moving spirit behind my American engagements with Mrs. Langtry and Hare, and subsequently with Miss Billie Burke. He must have been about the same age as myself—I met him first on the steamer in which I was returning to England after my first

American experience, and somehow, even in those days, one felt that he was a live wire who was going to do something remarkable. I seem to remember him in a state of chronic bankruptcy, out of which his brother Dan (who, in Charlie's salad days, was the highly respected manager, for the Mallorys, of the Madison Square Theatre) used to extricate him. Charlie always came out of these crises without any loss of credit or reputation, and his indomitable pluck, added to an astounding shrewdness in matters dramatic, at last won the day for him, placing him at the very head of the commercial managers in New York and a little later in London.

Frohman's love of the stage was by no means bounded by pecuniary considerations. He had a genuine passion for it, and in his own peculiar way was a great artist. He would sooner do a thing that he thought worth while, and fail, than be connected with some huge financial success that did not appeal to his artistic sense. His ambition was to become as outstanding a figure on the London stage as he was in New York, and I think his love of power was a strong factor in his disposition. He delighted in feeling that his was the master mind behind great enterprises; nor, when he had won this power, can I recall any single instance of his misapplying it. He was of a curiously simple, lovable nature, and was always accessible, friendly and encouraging, when he was at the height of his career. I should imagine that his proudest moment was when he first produced "Peter Pan": he would sooner have put on that play and lost money than that anybody else should have done so and made a fortune.

One of the London plays which he produced was

Pinero's "Letty," in which I acted with Irene Vanbrugh, Dion Boucicault and Harry Irving. Miss Nancy Price, who had been a member of my Company some years before, also had a good opportunity of which she availed herself to the full. This play was of special interest to me in that it brought me once again into collaboration with my old friend, Pinero.

No author, I suppose, of a past day—or of any day, perhaps—has gone through so many changes as has Pinero. It seems almost incredible that the man who wrote "Dandy Dick" should be the same as the writer of plays so widely differing from each other as "Sweet Lavender," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "The Gay Lord Quex," "Letty," and "Iris." It has always seemed to me that Pinero's plays reached the high-water mark of construction and of character-drawing, and I believe—I say this with a certain amount of trepidation, for it may be that he will see these lines—that in years to come his name will be remembered when that of most of the playwrights of his time are forgotten.

I myself must have acted in some eight or ten of his plays. He invariably provided me with a good part, and the plays themselves were invariably successful.

With two exceptions.

The first was a curious imaginative little one-act play, "The Widow of Wastdale Head," in which it fell to me to play a ghost. Here, I take leave to think, Pinero made one of his few mistakes. I did not look in the least like a ghost, and the way to have got a far better and more appropriately eerie effect would have been to have employed some such means as Pepper's Ghost—an effect easily obtained. Instead



of this I had to make my entrance on to a darkened stage through the fireplace and to the accompaniment of flickering lights. I was, in short, a very palpable human being, although, if I remember rightly, my clothes were ineffectively painted with phosphorus. Had Pinero, than whom there never has been a better producer, employed something of the weird and supernatural in his production of "The Widow," I think it would have escaped being the failure it undoubtedly was.

It was a charming little story, but for its success it demanded just that atmosphere which actually it did not get.

The other comparative failure was "The Freaks," a clever play, but produced when the War was at its height and worried into a rather early grave by incessant air-raids. I had a very funny scene in that play, but Fate appeared to be against me, for almost every evening just as it was about to come on, Dion Boucicault, the manager, would walk on to the stage in his dress clothes, and with a suavity of voice and deprecatory manner in which he had few equals, would say:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have just received from the Field-Marshal commanding the London District a warning that an air-raid is imminent. Of course, those of you who wish to leave the theatre are at liberty to do so; but if I may venture upon a piece of advice, I would suggest to you that you are as safe here as you would be outside. For our part, we intend to carry on."

With these words, and a comprehensive bow, he would retire into some species of dugout—leaving us to carry on! After which, every door that banged

was a bomb, and no smile of any sort or kind could be extracted from an audience in momentary expectation of being hurled into eternity.

I have spoken here of Pinero, and in an earlier chapter of Henry Arthur Jones. Perhaps my early days were more identified with their plays than with those of anyone else, but I must not forget Sydney Grundy, Claude Carton and Haddon Chambers.

Sydney Grundy was a typical North Countryman. Bluff and brusque in his manner, he was the last man you would have imagined to be the author of such delicate work as his was. His greatest successes, probably, were adaptations from the French: he had a way all his own of rendering a French play in such a form that it did not offend English susceptibilities, or those of the British Censor, at the same time preserving the champagne and sparkle of the Gallic original. This was notably the case in "A Pair of Spectacles," which he adapted for Hare, and of which I have already spoken. In the French version the wife really did go off the rails with the curate, and the husband was presented merely as the cuckold of whom French farce writers are so fond. Grundy transformed this episode into a decent and far more dramatic affair. The audience knew—and everyone knew except Benjamin Goldfinch—that there was nothing whatever between the pair, and that his imagination had been distorted through his use of the wrong pair of spectacles. The delight of the audience at seeing the dear old man come to his senses was far greater than could have been their amusement at his being made to look foolish.

I think I acted in two of Grundy's plays, one being "The Degenerates" and the other a piece which Hare

did, and called in America "The Mousetrap"—the English title escapes my memory. I can see Grundy now, a kindly but undemonstrative critic of the Company, rehearsing his play with his pipe, of which he was as fond as Mr. Baldwin (and in point of fact he rather resembled the late Prime Minister in appearance)—with his pipe never out of his mouth, a silent figure which would suddenly make an apposite suggestion in the fewest possible number of words spoken with a markedly North-Country accent. He was a neighbour of mine in London, and we became great friends. His daughter, Lily Grundy, was the *ingénue* of Mrs. Langtry's Company when her father's piece was being played.

Haddon Chambers was an erratic little genius. I think he started his career in Australia, but although I knew him very well and played in at least one of his pieces—"The Tyranny of Tears"—I never got behind the scenes with him personally. He was a rather mysterious individual, and I think he once told me that he had served before the mast. But whatever his antecedents, he was an extraordinarily clever dramatist, and nothing in his appearance would lead one to the belief that he had ever been anything else.

There was no more lovable character in the world than Claude Carton, who to everyone's sorrow has died since I have been engaged upon this book. His was an undefeated talent for writing witty and whimsical dialogue, and he had that curious facility, given to few people, of saying the unexpectedly funny thing. Indeed, his spoken word was as amusing as his written.

I can remember him playing poker at the Green Room Club, one of a party consisting of Charles

Dickens (son of the great Charles Dickens), George Delacher, Fred Leslie, Terriss and myself. Turning to a waiter who happened to be passing at the moment, he asked what there was for dinner that night.

The waiter was an unutterably stupid-looking fellow with a walrus moustache, and on receipt of Claude's query his face became absolutely impenetrable in its idiocy. As no answer appeared to be forthcoming, Claude turned to him again and said persuasively:

"Believe me, I am not asking from motives of idle curiosity."

He was a brother of the late Sir Anderson Critchett, also an old friend of mine, and was the husband of the incomparable Kate Compton. There can seldom have been quite such a curious partnership as that between Claude and his wife, who, alas, only survived her husband by a few days.

She was an actress whom it is very difficult to appraise. Statuesque and benignant and very much the *grande dame*, she walked through her parts on the stage in a way that was absolutely a law unto itself and impossible of imitation. It will never be known whether she could have played any other part beside Miss Compton—but no one ever wanted her to.

Claude became inspired whenever he was writing for his wife. I shall never forget her saying in "Robin Goodfellow," in a situation in which she had just arrived home after a rather rough Channel crossing:

"Is lunch ready? I'm dreadfully hungry. I never eat anything, crossing the Channel. Quite the reverse."

Poor Claude! He was sitting at the back of the stalls during a rehearsal of one of his plays in which

Miss Annie Hughes took a leading part. Delightful actress though she always was and is, Miss Hughes was in a rather argumentative mood on this occasion—a characteristic of leading ladies—and was explaining at considerable length her inability to understand the meaning of something in her part.

Claude listened for a long time to this dissertation. And then at last:

“I’m beginning to think I’m being Miss-Hughes-ed,” he said wearily.

## CHAPTER X

### MY SECOND MANAGEMENT

MY next move was to rejoin my old friends, Tree as manager, Robert Buchanan as author, in a curious play called "The Charlatan." Like most of Buchanan's work, it was full of ideas, but I do not remember that it had any great success. The particular hits of the play were made by Mrs. Tree (Lady Tree as she is now) and myself; we had two really good parts, and good parts are the high road to fame and fortune. How often I have told budding actors not to bother about salaries when they are young, but to go for good parts, for these in time will bring the good salaries with them. So many inexperienced actors seem to think that the amount of money they get is all-important—and it counts for so little as they grow older. A course of good salaries and bad parts will eventually put the lid on any prospect of future prosperity.

After "The Charlatan" came another Buchanan play, "The Society Butterfly" at the Opera Comique, in which Rose Leclerq, Willie Herbert, Mrs. Langtry and I appeared.

Mrs. Langtry wore a lot of very valuable jewellery on the stage, and a private detective was always in evidence just outside her dressing-room. I seemed to recognize the man, and he turned out to be the one-

time valet of an old friend of mine. He was a pugnacious little Irishman, and I remember in the days of his servitude his having a tussle with one of several footmen—who were all considerably over six feet in height, he himself being a shade under five feet. It happened that the footman had been philandering with one of the maids, whom Kelly (that was his name) had adopted as his own particular friend.

One morning the two men appeared on duty, Kelly with a slightly discoloured eye, the footman a heap of misery, minus several teeth, and looking as if he had been run over by a steam-roller. In the course of cross-examination by their master, "'Im and me 'ad a difference," declared Kelly.

"What about?" was the natural sequel to this rather obvious explanation.

"I done it out of pike (pique)," said Kelly, confident that the matter was now as clear as daylight.

He guarded Mrs. Langtry's jewels very effectively, and I fancy ended his career as the driver of a hansom cab.

It was somewhere about now that I played Sir Woodbine Grafton in "Peril" at the Garrick, a very noteworthy revival of the play under Arthur Bouchier's management. It was strange that, since my early beginning as the German doctor in "The New Magdalen," I had never been cast to play an old man. In their anticipatory notices of "Peril" the critics were a little doubtful as to my suitability to the part, which had formerly been associated with Arthur Cecil and Tree; but fortunately it was actor-proof and I was able to make a success in it at least equalling that of my predecessors.

Violet Vanbrugh, Leonard Boyne and Brandon Thomas were in the cast. Brandon Thomas was an old and intimate friend of mine; I first knew him in the "Sweet Lavender" days, but since then he had won fame and a considerable fortune as the author of "Charlie's Aunt." Generous to a fault, he was like most generous people—unbusiness-like; and "Charlie's Aunt" was productive of a lot of bickering between him and Penley. I remember that one night during the run of "Peril" he seemed extremely preoccupied. He went on the stage in a sort of dream, forgetting most of his lines and apparently quite oblivious to his surroundings. We made our exit together, and as we walked off, he said to me:

"Fred, what do you suppose I was thinking about during that scene?"

"Anything but the author," I answered.

Very earnestly, with his glass in his eye, and in a tone of deep emotion, he replied:

"I was thinking I ought to be friends with Penley."

In the near future I was to have a good deal to do with Brandon Thomas, and as far as I was concerned his attitude towards business became more reliable.

My success in "Peril" was so great that I made up my mind to have a second shot at management.

H. T. Brickwell, who had been Edward Terry's business manager and, incidentally, mine when I had Terry's Theatre, came into partnership with me, and we took the Court Theatre. We started off with a play by George R. Sims and Leonard Merrick, called "A Woman in the Case." It was the old



story of a good Press and bad business. I never liked the piece very much myself, but my partner persuaded me to do it, I think, because he imagined that the good Press which George R. Sims was practically certain to obtain would be a valuable asset to us in our start.

The play had only a short run, and I followed it with a very brilliant comedy, adapted from the French of Pierre Wolff by Brandon Thomas. The French title was "*Celles qu'on Respecte*," and the English "*Women are so Serious*."

"*Women are so Serious*" was a subtle title for a play in which the hero philanders with three women, not caring twopence about any of them, whereas they take him very much in earnest. But it suffered from the fact that people invariably misread it. When Brandon Thomas and I invented it, we intended it to be "*Women are so Serious*," whereas the public persistently read it "*Women are so Serious*," thereby entirely altering the meaning.

With "*The Tyranny of Tears*" it ranks in my memory as the best of the many good comedies I have played in. Miss Ellis Jeffreys was my leading lady, and made a tremendous success; and I may perhaps be pardoned if I quote from a notice which was written by Clement Scott, and which we took care to distribute freely.

"I could go again and again to the Court Theatre to watch every detail, every change, every tone, every nuance of the acting of Ellis Jeffreys and Fred Kerr in this play. You will say it is exaggerated, but I can't help it, for I tell the truth when I assert that Ellis Jeffreys and her clever companion took me back to the days when the Comédie Française was

an intellectual treat and Farquell was the reigning star at the Vaudeville."

And a good deal more to that effect.

Constance Collier, Mabel Terry Lewis, George Giddens, and Herbert Standing were all of them as successful in the play as we were—it was, in fact, one of those pieces which it is a pleasure to act in, and I think it would have run twice as long as it did, but for the unfortunate mistake in the title.

Before the play of the evening, by way of a *lever de rideau*, we had a concert party called the Musketeers, which was presided over by Herbert Clayton, now the successful partner in the firm of Clayton and Waller. In the concert party, among a number of clever people, were Bertram Wallis and poor old Jimmy Blakeley—then young Jimmy Blakeley.

I often regret the passing of the "first piece." I don't quite know why it should have passed; the only reason, presumably, is that the public has manifested a dislike to going to the theatre early. And yet I can't help feeling that many three-act comedies would benefit greatly by condensation, and that three Acts playing two hours and a half would be a great deal better if stripped of their padding and reduced to two hours. They would then have to be preceded by a first piece.

Moreover, the first piece was of very great value to young actors: I learned my business playing in them at the old Court Theatre. The young actor who plays the principal part is leading man, character actor, comedian, and possibly old man all rolled into one. He occupies the stage for the greater part of three-quarters of an hour, and plays a scene of much greater length than anything he is likely

to attain to in important plays for a long time to come. Again, the first piece gives the understudies something to do, and if it is an interesting little playlet, well produced and reasonably well acted, I feel sure that the pit and gallery appreciate it, while the stalls will always take kindly to an entertainment at which they need not be present.

Sometimes, however, the first piece is inadvisable on the score of expense or the manager's inability to find a really good one. This latter was my own case at the Court Theatre, and we gave the audience instead a very delightful half-hour with the Musketeers.

After "Women are so Serious" had finished its run, it was followed by Stuart Ogilvie's "John Durnford, M.P.," to which I have already alluded in suggesting a reason for its failure. It was the one real failure which I produced, but I still think it was a good play, though perhaps better read than acted.

My chief recollection of all this period was the terrible anxiety inseparable from theatrical management. Everything seems to fight against the manager: the weather is either too warm or too cold, fog is fatal, so is snow, so is a really hot sun; and a royal personage usually dies at the critical moment in a play's career, when it only needs a helping hand to become a great success, or a gentle push to send it headlong down the slope it may have already begun to descend. Looking back on those days, I am inclined to think I could not have been a very good man of business. I remember meeting Pinero just before I went into the Court Theatre. He wished me good luck in my venture, and then added:

"But why the Court? We were there together in 'The Magistrate' and 'Dandy Dick,' and I continued there after Clayton's death until it broke my heart."

It very nearly broke mine also. For some reason or other, the Court Theatre twenty-five or thirty years ago was an almost impossible proposition. Judging by the run of "The Farmer's Wife" and other plays of recent days, it has outlived its early idiosyncrasies. Although it is in Sloane Square, next door to an Underground Station, and on the route of omnibuses to all parts of London, no further in a cab from the West End Clubs than Drury Lane, the public obstinately refused to remember its existence. A successful play like "Women are so Serious" would do very good business from the Bond Street libraries but take nothing at the doors of the theatre. I have by me a "returns" account for one night, which shows that in a house of £97 in all, £94 10s. came from Bond Street. In other theatres, it was usual to expect the house to be at least the double of what came into it from the libraries, and if I had been playing the piece at the Criterion, the house would probably have been nearer £200.

It is very difficult to dogmatize on the question of theatrical management. I have already deplored the passing of the actor-manager, but judging by my own experience I can hardly be surprised at it. My time at the Court Theatre brought home to me the words of my old friend, John Hare, when he expressed the belief that, having been a manager myself, I should be more inclined to make allowances for a manager's irritabilities.

I hate the attitude of those actors who are always stirring up strife and misunderstanding with the management. If a play is a failure, the manager is the chief sufferer. It is of course hard luck for the actor, but he at least gains experience from his rehearsals, and has thus been employing usefully what would in most cases have been idle time. But the poor manager loses his money; and his very real and permanent loss is a more serious business than the actor's temporary disappointment.

It seems to me that the most fortunate climax to an actor's career is his entry into stardom, the system, obtaining largely in America, which Charles Frohman did so much to encourage in this country. The actor who plays the principal part at a large salary and with a share of the profits is in about as happy a position as an actor can expect to be; though at the same time, I have grave doubts as to the wisdom of starring one actor to the detriment of all the rest of the cast. As a system it produces a great deal of heartburning and a great deal of injustice. It certainly seems hard that young actors should make real successes in parts, and still remain "also ran"; but on the whole I don't know that there is so very much to grumble about, for if they go on making successes they are pretty certain to emerge in their turn from the ruck, and possibly become stars themselves. The "all-star cast" is a popular form of advertisement nowadays. It simply means that all the principal members of the Company are well-known actors, of whom one is as entitled to be starred as another.

My management ended with the run of "John Durnford, M.P.," and I am rather glad to think it

is an episode in my career not likely to be repeated—although one never knows.

Management did one thing for me—it placed me in a more important position, and was a forerunner of a number of fine parts and a considerable rise in my pecuniary value as an actor. For I found myself playing Nat Goodwin's part in "When we were Twenty-one" as a star, almost immediately after my managerial adventure.

"When we were Twenty-one" was perhaps the most successful of H. V. Esmond's plays, and had a tremendously long run in America where I had seen it. Nat Goodwin brought it to London, where it repeated its success; and we were very successful with it on tour. My part was a charming one—that of an old bachelor who falls in love with a girl who was the ward of himself and three other old cronies.

After this tour Charles Wyndham revived "The Tyranny of Tears" with the original cast and with as great a success as before. This time it was at Wyndham's Theatre instead of the Criterion.

Then came the triple bill, also at Wyndham's Theatre, of which "L'Énigme" was the chief item. I have spoken about "L'Énigme," but the two other one-act plays are well worth recalling. The principal actors in each of them are unhappily gone. Leonard Boyne as Felix O'Callaghan in "Irish Assurance" gave a spirited performance of the boisterous old-fashioned farce which had already begun to die out, and Charles Warner played the hero of a gruesome little melodrama, "Heard at the Telephone."

This was the kind of play which the Grand Guignol

exploits at the present time. The hero hears his wife being strangled at the other end of a telephone miles away. Warner, who was a great actor of intensely emotional parts, gave a blood-curdling performance, a fine thing in its way but surely misplaced as a means of entertainment to an average audience.

The telephone was still by way of being somewhat *rara avis* at that time, and the horror of the play was accentuated by the use of this unaccustomed medium. Nowadays, whenever an author wants an old-fashioned aside, he has recourse to the telephone, which plays just as important a part as the *raisonneur* of French comedy.

Soon after this, I signed an agreement to go to America again, this time with Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

"The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" was our principal stand-by. I have already paid tribute to Mrs. Campbell's performance in the name part, and though Tanqueray, which I played, is a rather neutral character, I always enjoyed playing him when she was my opposite.

I also played Colonel Schwartz in "Magda," a part after my own heart, but one which in years to come proved unlucky for me. It was while playing Schwartz to another Magda, more than twenty years afterwards, that I was smashed up in a taxi accident in New York. But I will leave the details of that and of its consequences until its proper place in a later chapter.

Mrs. Campbell produced a new play on this tour—Sudermann's "Joy of Living"—a fine play with another good part for Mrs. Campbell, and incidentally one for me. It was an interesting tour, this

one; it was also my wife's first visit to America, and under the auspices of Mrs. Campbell, who of course had been there before, she very much enjoyed her experiences.

I recall that among other events, Mrs. Campbell gave a huge party at the Illinois Theatre, Chicago, in aid of a local charity. The invited guests had to buy their tickets of admission, bunches of violets were sold for \$10 each, and a cluster of roses was auctioned off for \$70; and \$500 was handed over to the charity.

Our home was at that time at Claygate, in Surrey, and we were the fortunate possessors of most admirable servants. After having been away in America for several months, we walked into our house on our return to find it as spick and span as though we had only been out for a stroll. By the time we had unpacked our boxes and had our dinner, it was difficult to believe that we had been away at all.

Which suggests the problem to me: why is it so impossible at the present day to get the slightest comfort out of one's servants? In my father's and mother's time, we had a butler who had been with us for twenty-four years, a cook of twenty-two years' service, and none of the other servants had been with us for less than eighteen years. They were part of the family; they took an interest in us, and we in them—an interest which was kept up long afterwards, when the butler had married the cook and had settled down as the landlord of a small hotel at Newmarket. I can very well remember his periodical visits to London to consult my father about the investment of his savings and about all his business complexities.

In my own day, my children's nurse was with us



for twenty years, and only left when my younger daughter had grown up. At the time of which I am speaking—about the spring of 1903—we had left our house for months in the keeping of her and two maids who were real old-fashioned retainers. But what has happened in this last quarter of a century is a mystery to me. Just a few people still have some of the old sort, but there are only a handful left; and the problem of the incompetence, ignorance and general undesirability of the young servant of to-day is such a painful one that I do not propose to pursue it any further.

My good fortune continued, and I played in a production of Frank Curzon's, an adaptation from the French of Maurice Hennequin and Georges Duval by Cosmo Gordon Lennox, called in English "Just like Callaghan." It was a funny farce with a really good part for myself, but I chiefly remember it as bringing me into contact with that admirable artist, Fanny Brough.

Fanny Brough in her own way was the legitimate successor of Mrs. John Wood. It would be absurd to say that she wholly filled her place, for dear old Matilda Wood left a gap much too big to be filled by any one person. But Fanny Brough at all events filled a portion of that gap very acceptably. She shared with Mrs. Wood an inimitable knack of speaking a funny line to the accompaniment of what, from an ordinary low comedian, would have been a wink, but in them was an indescribable twinkle of the eye.

The play had the advantage of being produced by Seymour Hicks, who was already coming to the front as a comedian of uncommon versatility. It

ran throughout the summer of 1903, and was followed by "Letty" at the Duke of York's Theatre.

"Letty" was, as I have said, another Pinero play, under the management of Charles Frohman. Frohman had established himself at the Globe, where his representatives were Dion Boucicault and William Lestocq, the former on the stage, the latter in a business capacity. Like all Pinero's plays, it was a brilliantly written and constructed work. Irene Vanbrugh was Letty herself, and H. B. Irving the hero; to my share fell the extraordinarily good part of a wealthy and somewhat vulgar stockbroker. I took for my model a rather well-known man and gave an unblushing imitation of him, which fortunately he never recognized, though most of his friends did. There was some talk at the time of my going to America in this play, but it came to nothing, for some reason I am unable to remember. From the Duke of York's I went back to the Haymarket, at that time under the management of the late Fred Harrison and Cyril Maude.

I felt very much at home at the Haymarket in those days; I had been there so often with Tree, and had known Harrison well in the past as Tree's business manager, while Cyril Maude, though younger than myself, had been at school with me at Charterhouse. It was an amusing play called "Lady Flirt," an adaptation from the French. Here again I was associated with Miss Ellis Jeffreys, and there was a young girl in the cast who has gone a very long way since those days. This was Madge Titherage, a pretty child then, who used to drive me mad by dancing whenever the band played.

Her father, George Titherage, was an old friend

of mine. An admirable actor, he did most of his best work in Australia, and I met him first in America. All the time he was not in the theatre he devoted to growing roses. It is always pleasant to welcome the success of one's friends' children.

A family I had known very well in the long-ago were the Arthur Lewis's—they used to live in a large house with a large garden on Campden Hill. Arthur Lewis was head of the firm of Lewis and Allenby, a man of very great distinction and culture. He married Miss Kate Terry, sister of Ellen, Marion, and Fred, and they had several jolly, good-looking daughters. Lawn tennis was then in its infancy, and Moray Lodge (as the house was called) was a popular venue for all the young people who were fortunate enough to be asked there.

Somewhat about now their daughter Mabel was married. I remember the ceremony vividly, at St. Mary Abbott's Church on a very hot day and with a crowd that was quite unmanageable. When I got into the church I found poor Mrs. Lewis at her wits' end as to how to deal with the masses of people who still thronged in, making it impossible for the bride and bridegroom or for the friends of the family to get through to their places. Luckily my experience as a stage manager stood me in good stead; I gave instructions to a sergeant from the bridegroom's regiment to dispose the men under his command in a certain manner, and had the satisfaction of seeing the torrent stop and the ceremony take place quite successfully.

A newspaper of the period asserts that "Mr. Fred Kerr, urbane of manner and immaculately dressed, was invaluable as an usher," and it has always been

my private opinion that but for me Mabel Lewis would never have been married at all!

Mrs. Lewis on her marriage had retired from the stage of which she was a great ornament, but made a short return to it many years afterwards, and I had the pleasure of acting with her in a play which Sir John Hare produced, called "The Master." She died not many years ago, leaving behind her quantities of pleasant memories, many friends, and a family that is carrying on the old Terry tradition. The Mabel I have been speaking about, after her husband's death resumed her maiden name, Miss Mabel Terry-Lewis, and is too well known and too popular to make it necessary for me to say anything more about her.

It really seems as if our English stock of authors was very attenuated in the first years of this century. There were Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Sydney Grundy, Claude Carton and Haddon Chambers—they appeared to be the only English writers of comedy existing. Perhaps I ought not to have included Grundy, for his best work was always exploited in making adaptations from the French. It is curious to note how in the intervening years all this has changed; nowadays we have lots of authors, good, bad, and indifferent, and when we go away from them we usually turn to New York. In fact, London and New York are becoming much the same place from the theatrical point of view.

As I have said before, it is difficult in writing down one's recollections to avoid becoming a mere day-to-day diarist; I repeat it because as I go on with this book I do not find the difficulty removing itself. So I am going to pass over a comparatively hum-

drum period until February, 1905, when I joined Frank Curzon's Company to play in a couple of Claude Carton's very successful farcical comedies.

The first of these was "Mr. Hopkinson"—an uproariously funny play. Described as a farce, it thoroughly deserved the title of comedy; may I attempt to suggest the difference between the two.

Usually the term "farce" is employed by authors who are presenting impossibilities, not necessarily otherwise than funny but none the less quite impossible. Somehow or other I can never get away from the feeling that the term "farce" is to a certain extent a term of reproach. Such plays as "The Magistrate," "Dandy Dick," or "Mr. Hopkinson" came from the extraordinary wit and whimsicality of the dialogue and the characterization—which are the true attributes of comedy—not farce.

And what a cast we had—Miss Compton (Mrs. Carton) in one of her typical Anthony Trollope parts, Harry Kemble as a sea-sick nobleman, and Jimmy Welch as the irrepressible little bounder Mr. Hopkinson, who comforted Kemble, when he was struggling with the nausea resulting from a recent Channel crossing, by saying:

"If I was you, my lord, I'd take a glass of hot mustard and water and make a clean job of it."

My part, although a good one, was not quite as prominent as those I had been playing for some time; but in the next play, "Public Opinion," Carton had provided me with a wonderful character in Spencer Traughton, a splenetic ex-Civil Servant who had spent most of his life as British Consul at Honduras. This time Kemble, though very amusing, was in

the same sort of position that I had been in in "Mr. Hopkinson," and Spencer Traughton was in his way a star part, just as Mr. Hopkinson had been the star part in the former play.

The butler in "Mr. Hopkinson" was played by Henry Stephenson, who migrated to New York very shortly afterwards in my part of the Duke, which he understudied in London. He is now a very well-known New York actor.

I think the part of Mr. Hopkinson himself was at first intended for Weedon Grossmith, who because of other engagements was unable to take it up. It was thought by the management to be so funny that it did not matter very much who played it—it would play itself—and for this reason they engaged a strong and somewhat expensive cast to carry the more or less unknown actor who would probably be called upon to play Mr. Hopkinson. But it was soon found that too much depended upon the part to make this idea feasible, so Jimmy Welch was engaged—and a delightfully funny thing he made of it.

Welch and Weedon Grossmith were friendly rivals in the same kind of part. Weedon was probably the more artistic of the two, and I can't help feeling that if he had played it, "Mr. Hopkinson" would be running still. Welch was an extremely good substitute, but being born a buffoon, he couldn't help clowning—a crime that Weedon would never have been guilty of.

It is very sad to me to look back on these plays and to feel that nearly all the people I have talked about are dead. Carton himself, his wife, Kemble, Welch, George Giddens, Charlie Allan, Weedon Grossmith—all have passed away. Their places have

never been filled; it seems a melancholy reflection that when an actor dies and his work dies with him, he cannot be said to have left a very permanent gap. He is soon forgotten and others, possibly, not to say probably, just as good as he was, reign in his stead.

## CHAPTER XI

### ELLEN TERRY—KING EDWARD—STAGE- DOOR KEEPERS

**I**N 1906—more than twenty years ago—my hair was becoming very thin on the top. Fortunately, Providence had still preserved for me a comparatively youthful face, and my old friend Willie Clarkson made up for Nature's deficiencies by providing me with a series of toupees for the different parts I played. These were so natural that, when I played an elderly man without one, I was congratulated by the Press on the excellence of my wig.

Actors and actresses, especially the latter, are obliged to cling desperately to their youthful appearance. It is a terrible parting of the ways, when an actress has to play mothers instead of daughters; but it is invariably the fact that the leading man and leading woman of the past make the best old man and woman of the present.

I have known actors who carried the toupee habit into their private lives. I remember one man—I won't mention his name, because I promised my publisher there should be no libel actions in the wake of this book—who for a long time had worn a toupee in real life, which made it appear that he was nearer thirty than sixty years of age. It was his misfortune



to quarrel rather violently with his leading lady. In the course of the play they were acting in at the time, she had to box his ears in a playful way. The night on which the row had occurred, she made of the harmless "ear-box" an extensive sweep of her hand, which entirely carried away the toupee, and left the poor fellow exposed in all his humiliating and hitherto unsuspected nakedness.

Books like "Who's Who" have effectually prevented public men from hiding the true record of their ages—rather, perhaps, to the actor's detriment. But these things have to be, and we can't expect to go on for ever playing juvenile parts. It was about this time that my elder daughter was discussing my age with a school friend (I was nearly fifty).

"How old really is your father?" asked the friend.

"I don't know exactly how old he is," replied Joyce, "but I'm pretty sure he's over forty."

"What!" exclaimed the other in a horror-stricken voice. "Over forty—and still acting!"

This dissertation on toupees and baldness was suggested by the remembrance of my next part—that of old Voysey in Granville Barker's play "The Voysey Inheritance" at the Court Theatre. An extraordinarily clever play, this, presenting a problem of the most subtle casuistry. The old man Voysey was a lawyer who had inherited a business which existed on fraud; his grandfather, his father, and he himself had been living on the profits made by gambling with their clients' money. But being something of a financial genius, Voysey had so juggled with the investment of what remained of that money that he had reduced the liabilities of the firm to about half what they had been, and was continuing the policy

at the moment when his eldest son was to be taken into partnership. The problem was, of course, was his son to ruin the business, his own family, and the clients, by refusing to become a party to the fraud, or was he, by joining his father in the wrongdoing to carry on the work of clearing the firm of its liabilities?

Old Voysey was a delightful old rascal—the sort of man you may see any morning getting out of the train at Waterloo with a geranium in his buttonhole, thoroughly respectable and respected, prosperous and opulent, and probably a churchwarden in his own suburban parish. It was one of those curious parts which bring the actor into a kind of friendly intimacy with many of his audience. Everyone seemed to know old Voysey and to have met him, and I had letters from all sorts of people, including one of His Majesty's judges, congratulating me on the verisimilitude of the character—letters which, after all, might better have been addressed to Granville Barker than to myself.

The managers of the theatre were Granville Barker and J. E. Vedrenne; and after "The Voysey Inheritance" they produced "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," with Ellen Terry as Lady Cecily and myself as Brassbound. This was my first and only appearance in a Bernard Shaw play. Somehow, whenever one mentions the name of Shaw, something is expected of a polemic nature. But as my experience of him was limited to the portrayal of this one part, I do not feel myself entitled to enter the lists.

Ellen Terry was, as always, divine—and how the audience used to love her! I remember one evening when she forgot her next line and looked at me with

an expression that could belong only to her. Just at that moment there came out of the darkness of the stalls a feminine voice intended to be confidential, but which was loud enough to be heard on the other side of the street.

"Dear Ellen Terry! Isn't she sweet! She's forgotten her words!"

I wonder how many actors and actresses have ever existed who stood so high in the affections of the public that even their failings were looked upon as virtues.

When one gets on the subject of Ellen Terry it is difficult to stop. There has been no one in my time just like her. I think of her as Juliet, Beatrice, the heroine of "New Men and Old Acres," Olivia in "The Vicar of Wakefield," and I don't believe that Sarah Bernhardt, or Duse, or any of the great actresses who were her contemporaries even approached her in what is perhaps the most unattainable characteristic of the great actress—magnetism. Her sister Marion comes nearer to her in this direction than anyone else I can think of, and I shall always feel that, for the sake of her reputation as an actress, it was Marion's misfortune to be Ellen's sister.

I have before me as I write a programme of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" autographed by Ellen Terry and the whole Company, in which in her own handwriting are the words:

"This evening, September 28th, 1906, is the 50th Anniversary of my first appearance on any stage."

Much has been written lately about Ellen Terry. She died full of years, as great a favourite of the public as she had been in her heyday. As a young woman she was fascinating and beautiful, and in her

later years a wise and beautiful old lady. In spite of all that has been deservedly said of her great performances of Shakespeare's heroines with Irving, I like best to remember her as the girl in "New Men and Old Acres" showing Brown round the old house, to which she was bidding adieu and which was passing into his hands. She pointed out all her favourite possessions with an indescribable sob in her voice; and when she came to the canary in its cage in the window and said, "You won't forget to give him some groundsel every Thursday. I always do that," the eyes of the whole audience were full of tears. I believe her greatest asset was her simplicity; and simplicity on the stage—how surely the priceless asset of the great actor!

It has invariably been a matter of regret to me that I never acted with Irving or with Dame Madge Kendal, and I shall always feel grateful to Bernard Shaw for giving me the opportunity of securing a remembrance as wholly delightful as my memory of Ellen Terry as Lady Cicely.

Some years after this, I was at a dinner given as a token of appreciation to Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker. The talk was greatly about Shaw, and I ventured the opinion that Shaw himself had never done anything as good as Granville Barker did in "The Voysey Inheritance." This remark of mine was received with great demonstrations of welcome and accord by a lady who was sitting near me. Later in the evening I discovered that she was Granville Barker's mother.

The Court Theatre engagement was followed by a little tour of "Three Blind Mice," a comedy by Arthur Law, of rather the same genre as "When we

were Twenty-one." My great friend and old colleague Miss May Palfrey was with me. And at the end of this tour Otho Stuart engaged me to produce and play in "Peter's Mother," by Mrs. Henry de la Pasture (who afterwards became Lady Clifford).

During its last week, "Three Blind Mice" was at Cheltenham, and I used to travel backwards and forwards between Cheltenham and London every day—I don't think I ever spent a week with so few hours in bed. I was rehearsing "Peter's Mother" from eleven to three, in the train from 3.30 till 6.30, then performing in "Three Blind Mice," and then in the train again to London, snatching what sleep I could on the journey. It was worth it, however, for "Peter's Mother" was a very great success, with which I am always glad to have been connected. It was so natural a play that it might almost be said to have been a human document. Marion Terry was in the name part, and played it with a tenderness and an exquisite finish which even Ellen could hardly have equalled.

The play received the honour of a Royal Command, and we went down to Sandringham to do it before the King and Queen on Her Majesty's Birthday. They sent for Marion Terry and myself after the performance, and the King said:

"I have already seen this play twice, and I thought it would be just the thing for the Queen's Birthday. It is one of the most charming plays I have ever seen, and it must be quite a pleasure to act in it."

I could not help replying:

"Your good opinion, sir, is probably more worth having than anybody else's, for I don't believe any one living sees as many plays as you do."

"I should go oftener to the play," he said, "if every play were as good as this."

We had special scenery made to fit the tiny stage at Sandringham, and we were instructed to ring up directly the King sat down in his seat. The theatre was very full, and there was a peep-hole through which I could watch the audience and see the Royal Family coming in, and give the signal for the curtain. As the King moved down the aisle to his seat with the Queen and the rest of his party, he seemed to have a friendly word for everyone he passed—they were all his friends and neighbours in no lesser degree than his subjects, and he had an extraordinary gift for putting people at their ease.

Some days after this performance, a mounted emissary arrived at my house and rang the bell. It was answered by a maid who had only just joined us, fresh from the country.

"Does Mr. Kerr live here?" inquired the equestrian.

"Yes, sir," timidly replied Abigail.

"From the King," announced the great man on horseback, producing a small packet—on receiving which the poor girl nearly expired, under the impression that I was about to be taken to the Tower and summarily executed. The packet, as a matter of fact, contained a very pretty cigarette-case from the King and Queen, and a charming note from the Comptroller speaking of Their Majesties' appreciation.

I had the honour and pleasure of meeting King Edward on several occasions—the first of these was rather quaint. When I was at Cambridge I rode a friend's pony to Newmarket to see the Two Thousand; it was the year Charibert won and Cadogan

was second. I rode alongside the race-course to see the start of the race, and as I was cantering along I became aware that my pony was inclined to make a race of it with another pony by its side. Rather to my discomfiture I saw that the rider of the other pony was the Prince of Wales (as he was then), and I only just managed to pull my nag up and to take my hat off.

Later in the afternoon a man came up to me and asked if the pony I was riding was for sale—as the Prince of Wales had taken rather a fancy to it.

A good many years after this I was playing at the Haymarket, and the Prince, who was in the audience, sent for me. The moment was unfortunate, for I was in my dressing-room with practically nothing on, changing for the next Act. I explained the position to the messenger, and asked him to convey my great appreciation of the honour, and my regrets.

A few minutes later he came back to my room.

“The Prince,” he said, “is quite sure he has met you before, and wants to know when and where it was.”

So I told him the story of Newmarket Heath, and he came back again to tell me that the Prince remembered the occurrence perfectly. I had often heard of the Prince’s wonderful memory; here was a very cogent proof of it.

After “Peter’s Mother” we produced “Three Blind Mice” in London. Arthur Law, the author of the play, had in his younger days been a member of the German-Reed Company with Miss Fanny Holland, who became his wife. The German-Reed Company was a great institution when I was a boy, including as it did the German-Reeds themselves

and Corney Grain, whose musical interlude—a sort of running caricature of the fads and fancies of the day—was probably the most popular item of the entertainment.

Next came W. J. Locke's play—I think it was his first—"The Palace of Puck," at the Haymarket, where I again had the pleasure of acting with Marion Terry. This was a fantastic, Midsummer-Night's Dream sort of play, which the critics described as Gilbertian—always the fate of any play depending even a little on topsy-turveydom. Locke's topsy-turveydom was quite as good a thing in its way as Gilbert's, but had no shadow of resemblance to it.

However, the play was not the great success we had all anticipated; some people said it was not very well cast, which may or may not have been true, but for myself I shall always believe it would have been more successful if its imaginative qualities had been allowed freer scope in the production. It was given a matter-of-fact, suburban setting rather like a pantomime, whereas it called for surroundings of charm and beauty—and these were rigorously denied it.

And now, in October, 1907, my old colleague, Ellis Jeffreys, went into management on her own account, with myself as her leading man. She took the then newly built Queen's Theatre, and opened it without any special inaugural ceremony, with a play called "The Sugar Bowl." This was by the very clever authoress of my old play "Jedbury Junior"—a pretty, graceful piece, but too slight to attain to any great success. Miss Jeffreys followed it with a play from America, written by Langdon Mitchell and called "The New York Idea."

The play was extremely brilliant, but it was before



its time. People in England neither knew nor cared much about the American divorce laws, with which the play largely dealt; had it been done ten or twelve years later it would have been a much greater success. Those who liked it raved about it—and the others stayed away. In short, it was a heart-breaking experience both for Miss Jeffreys and myself.

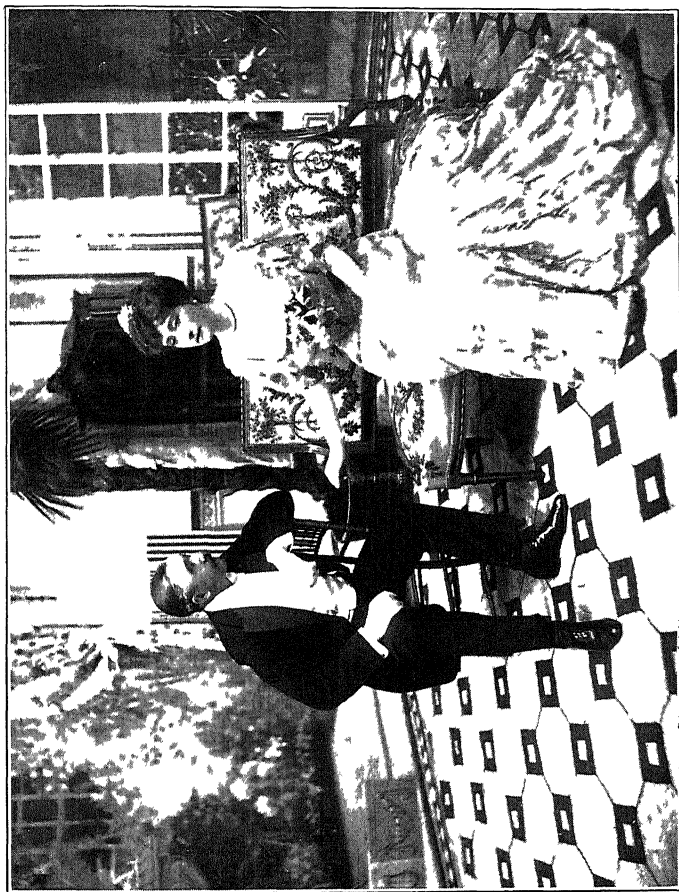
It is very difficult to account for a failure of this kind. I remember getting a letter from my old friend Marshall Hall—a great theatre-goer and a most reliable judge of things dramatic—to the effect that it was the most brilliant and the best acted comedy he had seen for years. I had other letters in the same strain. The Press, on the whole, was excellent. How is it possible, then, to account for its non-success?

It doesn't seem much good trying to. I give it up.

After Sir John Hare's virtual retirement from the stage, I took on his old dresser William Reader, an extraordinary character who had been with Hare for many years and who considered himself absolutely indispensable to Hare and part and parcel of all Hare's successes. He would extract a dilapidated pair of trousers from a wardrobe basket and exhibit them with the proud assertion:

"That's what we wore as Eccles."

He was an invaluable man, however, with an unerring instinct as to the relative desirability of the people who called at the stage door to see the manager. I followed Hare's example, and used to send Reader to take preliminary stock of them. He made short work of the wastrels, and used to come back into the dressing-room and stolidly continue his job of brushing clothes, with the laconic observation:



MISS ELLIS JEFFREYS AND MR. FRED KERR IN "THE SUGAR BOWL" (1907)



"You don't want to see 'im."

Theatrical dressers are a funny lot. As old Sergeant Horsford, the stage-door keeper of the Haymarket years ago, said of the Haymarket Company, in predicting the success of a play we were rehearsing:

"I have seen the Company, Mr. Tree, sir. It's a fine body o' men."

I won't go so far as to call dressers a fine body of men; but they certainly are a mysterious army. A great many of them have all sorts of unexpected occupations during the day, and do the job of "dressing" at night by way of making a useful addition to their incomes. But others have nothing to do outside the theatre. I often used to wonder from what class the crowd at cricket matches was drawn. One day, as I walked round the Oval, I was greeted by one of the dressers in my theatre; and then the truth dawned upon me that the crowd must principally consist of theatrical dressers!

A very worthy but very stupid individual used once upon a time to dress me in the old days at the Court Theatre—I think he was called Alfred. At that time there was a mania for the game of extracting as many short words as possible out of one long word—such as Constantinople. I and my stable companion had written down several score of words, when Alfred, who had been watching us with the most intent interest, suddenly volunteered:

"'Ave you got 'hat'?"

Seeing that we looked a little puzzled, he explained blandly:

"Hay-t."

This was the age of the Waterbury watch. The

chief peculiarity of Waterbury watches was that you apparently never finished winding them up. They cost about a shilling or eighteenpence, and each one bore a guarantee and a promise on the part of the manufacturers that they would repair it, if necessary, free of charge.

Whether mine got tired of being wound up I cannot say; but it stopped suddenly, and I took it to pieces with a view to discovering what its ailment might be. I removed a number of cases with a pen-knife, and at last came upon one in the very bowels of the watch which was firmly screwed down and had on it the inscription:

“Do not remove this unless you are a skilled watch-maker.”

I wanted only just some such incentive as this to make me continue my explorations. As I removed the last screw from the case, the mainspring, a thing like a boa-constrictor, leapt out and lay quivering on the other side of the room. Alfred, taking, as always, an intelligent interest in my doings, nearly had a fit. I told him to go and pick the thing up—which he did with the tongs, holding them at arm’s length, under the obvious conviction that he was wrestling with something from the Infernal Regions. I squashed it back into its place by main force, and by a combined effort we screwed down the case with the minatory inscription. Then, without comment, I sent the watch to the Waterbury works.

A few days later I received it back, going quite peacefully and entirely in its right mind. In the packet was a plaintive little note from the Company:

“We think the watch must have been tampered with by unskilled hands.”

The Sergeant Horsford whom I have mentioned was a great character. He had the interests of the Haymarket Theatre at heart and took a sort of fatherly pride in all Tree's doings. On one occasion, as Tree left the theatre after entertaining a party of friends and admirers on a successful first night, Horsford with an air of confidential encouragement let him out through the stage door and said.

"Ye've had a great success to-night, Mr. Tree, sir," "I saw two gintlemen comin' out from the pit circle, and as they passed me the one said to the other there was not more than ten or a dozen actors in London could have took the bit better."

To be a stage-door keeper requires the characteristics of a successful Cabinet Minister. He is the watchdog and confidant of the management and the whole of the Company. He has to be an adept in the use of the telephone, he has to combine good manners with peremptory firmness when dealing with unknown callers; and once a stage-door keeper always a stage-door keeper—except, probably, in theatres where musical comedies are played. I should imagine that there the stage-door keeper is in a position to retire and buy house property while still in the prime of life.

I remember the old fellow at Toole's Theatre, when I was playing there with Clayton and Cecil after the closing of the old Court Theatre. He was a silent, taciturn individual, who never spoke to me—or, for that matter, to anyone else. During a wait, one warm evening, I went out to the stage door to finish a pipe; and there I ventured the remark that he must find it dull sitting alone in his box all day with Charing Cross Hospital next door.

He slowly removed an ancient and black pipe from his mouth and shook his head reflectively.

"It's a lively place," he volunteered. "I sets 'ere mornin', noon and night. I sees 'em took in next door, I 'ears 'em a'ollerin' and a'shriekin' when the knife goes in. Sometimes they comes out, sometimes they doesn't. Oh, it's a lively place."

That was the only conversation I ever had with him.

## CHAPTER XII

### MIDDLE-AGED PARTS—ENTER MY SON

AFTER the Ellis Jeffreys management I produced a play by E. W. Horning called "Stingaree," under the management of J. E. Vedrenne; and this was followed by "Mrs. Dot," Somerset Maugham's tremendously successful vehicle for Miss Marie Tempest.

What I have already said about farce applies to "Mrs. Dot," which was really legitimate comedy in spite of a farcical tendency. Marie Tempest's performance was delightful, and I played an old bachelor to whom she, for reasons connected with the plot, pretended to make love with the object of rendering another man jealous. James Blenkinsop, as I was called in the play, entered whole-heartedly into the spirit of this mock lovemaking. In one scene I had to kneel at Miss Tempest's feet, and as the play had a very long run I narrowly escaped an attack of housemaid's knee. So one evening, just as I came to the line when I had to fling myself before her, I seized a cushion from a sofa on the stage and carefully disposed my knees on the cushion instead of on the floor.

The consequence of this impromptu was a sniff from Miss Tempest, then a giggle, and then a fit of laughter in which I had to join so uncontrollably that the cur-



tain very nearly had to be rung down upon the pair of us.

Sometimes it is impossible to avoid this sort of hysterical mirth.

I have often heard people say how they resent the fact that the actors and actresses on the stage are having a joke among themselves, and I quite agree that it is very reprehensible; but there are moments when, try as you will, you cannot choke the laughter down.

An incident of this kind occurred when I was playing with Ellen Terry in "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." Towards the end of the play, in a scene that was entirely serious, I had to show her a portrait of my mother. The one we used was, of course, any casual photograph that the property man happened to hand me when I was going on the stage. As a rule we neither of us looked at it; but on this particular evening the property man had given me the picture of an extremely stout ballerina with next to no clothes on, and as I passed it across the table to Dame Ellen I saw it for the first time—and hoped that it would escape her notice. No such luck, however! Whether or not she instinctively felt that there was something a little unusual in my attitude I do not know, but she gave one glance at the semi-nude ballet girl, and went off into such a fit of suppressed laughter that we dared not look at each other for the rest of the Act.

"Mrs. Dot" went to America at the end of its London run, and I with it. It seemed to me impossible that there could be another actress in the name part after Marie Tempest, but Charlie Frohman had secured the American rights of the play for a young

star in whose success he was particularly interested. This was Billie Burke—and a most delightful girl she was. If she lacked Marie Tempest's unique qualification for parts of this kind, she brought a freshness and a charm into her portrayal of the character which atoned for the loss.

I shall never forget poor Charlie Frohman rehearsing the play. Charlie, as I have already said, was a very artistic little man, whose ideas were generally right, but who had no practical method of stage management and no ability in demonstrating exactly what he wanted. He was trying ineffectually to explain a bit of business to Billie Burke, which necessitated her going over the same thing an endless number of times. Each time Charlie would come up from his seat in the stalls and cross over to Billie, to explain once again what he wanted her to do—but just precisely what that was she was totally unable to divine from his exposition. I, who had played in the piece for the best part of a year in London, and who had to carry on as soon as this bit of business was settled, became more and more bored at the prolongation of the rehearsal. I suppose I must have shown it; for when he came across the stage for about the twenty-fifth time, Frohman looked at me, paused, put his hand into his waistcoat pocket, brought out a cigar about as long as an umbrella, stuck it between my lips, and then continued his twenty-fifth journey in the progress of Billie's instruction.

However, Billie took all this hammering in an extremely sporting spirit, made an unqualified success of the part, and played it for a whole season. After producing a comparative failure in her next season she fell back on a revival of the play. I had, mean-

while, gone on a short tour with Miss Maxine Elliott in a play called "The Inferior Sex"; it was just as Miss Elliott's tour finished that Frohman decided upon the revival of "Mrs. Dot," and I was glad to go back to what was a grateful part in very charming society.

I thoroughly enjoyed my tours with Bille Burke. She made a sort of Dutch uncle of me, and I was always called in to rescue her when she wanted to escape from the unremitting attentions of the *jeunesse dorée* of Cleveland, Pittsburg or Minneapolis.

We had a very strange experience in one of the small towns we visited. We stayed in an hotel—I forget its name or just where it was. It was owned and run by a man—whose name I also forget—who prided himself on being a reformed crook. While we sat in the hotel lounge after the performance he gave us a most amazing exposition of a crook's methods and of all his tricks of the trade. He was a master of legerdemain and an extremely entertaining fellow, not unreasonably proud of his former achievements and of the fact that, having secured by their means a sufficiency of money to keep him in comfort for the rest of his life, he had settled down and become a highly respectable and respected citizen.

I think he was Mayor of the town and a great friend of the Rector.

Some years after this Billie Burke married Florenz Ziegfeld, who thus lived up to his reputation as a judge of feminine beauty.

And here I may incidentally remark that Billie looks as young and as pretty to-day as she did then in 1911.

My two seasons in America at an end, I drifted back

to England and played in one of Fred Lonsdale's early plays. It was called "The Best People"—but had no relation to the recent play of the same title.

In those days Lonsdale was not the power he has since become, but there was no mistaking his promise. He had then as now a genius for writing amusing dialogue, which has the merit of being absolutely natural and entirely innocent of epigram. His conversation, moreover, is just as amusing as his written word. I remember a discussion about conversational gambits to which there is no obvious answer. Someone propounded the question, "What do you say when an American says he is very pleased to meet you?"

"Granted," was Lonsdale's instant reply.

In this play I had for colleague an old friend who had been in my Company when I was a manager—Eva Moore—and also a rather curious character, Charles Sugden.

Sugden, though always in clothes quite peculiar to his own taste, was an extraordinarily well-dressed man. He generally had a white hat, and invariably carried a straw in his mouth. He may also be said to have been the champion bankrupt of his time. I remember in the course of conversation a great many years ago, John Clayton's asking him:

"How many times have you been bankrupt, Charlie?"

"Six," replied Charlie, with a feeble attempt to turn the conversation into another channel.

"And what did you pay in the pound the first time?" said Clayton.

"Seven and six," said Charlie, making another effort at changing the topic.

"What the second time?" persisted Clayton.

"Five shillings."

"And the third time?"

"Three and six."

"And the fourth?"

"Eighteenpence."

"And the fifth time?"

At this Charlie, unable to bear himself any longer, murmured reproachfully:

"Really, my dear John, this is a very painful subject to me."

Perhaps the funniest story connected with bankruptcy is one told of dear old Charlie Hawtrey, who, in spite of his tremendous successes and the enormous amount of money which passed through his fingers, was always in pecuniary difficulties and was for years an undischarged bankrupt.

The Income Tax Commissioners eventually dropped on him for arrears of Income Tax, which had accumulated during the years of his financial embarrassment to a sum running into four or five figures. Feeling that some steps were called for, Charlie wrote to his solicitor asking if he would make it convenient to call on him for a few minutes at the theatre, as a consultation on Income Tax matters would appear advisable. Three o'clock in the afternoon on a Wednesday or Saturday would suit him best, he added.

The lawyer turned up duly at three o'clock on the following Wednesday, and Charlie placed in his hands several sheets of foolscap closely covered with figures.

"I'm going on the stage for a few minutes," he said, "and meanwhile you might look over these.

Then I shall have a quarter of an hour's wait, and perhaps you will be able to advise me what I had better do."

The lawyer thereupon went into the figures with the rapidity of an expert, and upon Charlie's return to his dressing-room, announced:

"Well, Mr. Hawtrey, I have looked through these figures, which seem to me quite correct and in order. But before I can take steps in the matter it is necessary that I should know when your financial year ends."

"Every day!" said Charlie, in his innocent and almost babyish whisper.

But I don't think that Sugden was ever in the position of an undischarged bankrupt. He used to get into a pecuniary mess, get out of it by going bankrupt, and then start afresh his apparently successful efforts at living like a prince with no visible means of subsistence. I remember his criticism of an actor who was playing the part of a man-about-town.

"Shocking! Awful! Didn't you see his waistcoat?"

I was drifting into middle-aged parts at this time, and played a General with Miss Lena Ashwell in a piece called "The Great Mrs. Alloway" by Douglas Murray; then followed Pinero's "Widow of Wastdale Head," to which I have already alluded, and shortly afterwards came an engagement under Arthur Bouchier's management in a play by Monckton Hoffe, which was originally called "Improper Peter," but was somewhat foolishly altered—I suppose out of respect to Mrs. Grundy's descendants—to "Proper Peter."

Bouchier himself played Peter, and I his father. I don't seem to remember much about the play except that the scene was a very life-like representation of a

yacht, and the nautical atmosphere was preserved by elaborate contrivances to make the *Nut*, as the yacht was named, roll with a motion rather uncomfortable for the actors. What might have happened if any of us had been bad sailors I hate to think.

This was not the only time I have been connected with mechanical contrivances to make a stage ship look as if it was really rolling. In my very early days at Wallack's Theatre, in "Youth," there was the scene of a raft-full of shipwrecked mariners—several of the principal characters in the piece—in the last stages of starvation, thirst and agony. This raft was made to bob up and down as if in a rough sea by means of four poles at its corners, which were pulled in rotation by four men beneath the stage, in the manner of church-bell ringers. One evening it occurred to some of us irreverent youngsters that it would be a good idea to run a rope across the floor on which the "bellringers" were standing. The result was that they were taken off their feet, the raft was nearly upset, and at least two of the shipwrecked actors fell into the "sea."

This reminds me of an incident in "The Inferior Sex" when I was playing it with Miss Maxine Elliott. There was a mutiny on board the yacht in which the action of the play took place, and in the course of my struggle with the mutineers one evening, I fell off the yacht into the rough sea, which was suggested by a sea-cloth kept on the move by some kind of gigantic bellows. I had the presence of mind to "swim" to the side of the vessel and pull myself on board again, and I think most of the audience believed that it was a natural incident in the play.

One day I was sitting in my Club when I received

an S.O.S. from Mr. Norman: would I undertake the production of an adaptation by Anstey of his famous book "The Brass Bottle." With the appeal came a copy of the play: would I read it and let Mr. Norman know at once. I did read it, and decided I could do nothing at all with it; it was a kind of fairy-tale and did not attract me in the least. However, Norman was insistent. It seemed that the play was already in rehearsal, and that the stage-management and Company were at loggerheads, and he appealed to me to come to the rescue. Eventually I did undertake the job, and it was a very odd experience.

I called in the help of Maskelyne and Cook, and thanks to them we put some really extraordinary illusions into the play. I myself was acting at the Criterion at the time, and on the first night of "The Brass Bottle" I hurried down to the Vaudeville, where it was being played, with the most gloomy forebodings as to its reception. To my intense astonishment I discovered that it had been an unqualified success.

Another first night to which I looked in after my own performance, was one at His Majesty's Theatre, under Tree's management, of a play by a very well-known author—who, with Tree, was an old friend and colleague of mine. Full of hope, I went to the back of the dress circle; I was just in time to see the curtain descend in solemn silence. Several times it went up and down upon Tree in a stained-glass attitude; and then out of the continued silence there grew an ominous murmur from the gallery of "Author."

I knew what was coming and left the theatre. As I went out I was passed by two servant girls who had



evidently come from the pit and were hurrying to catch their bus. One had to drop back a little to pass me, and in doing so she raised her voice slightly; a fragment of her conversation with her friend thus reached my ears.

"What I can't make out, is 'ow people re'earse such a play!"

Tree's friends were probably at that very moment congratulating him on his success.

What a horrible catastrophe it is when one produces a play that seems foredoomed to failure, when the first performance tells you that the whole thing is hopeless. I remember an instance in New York many years ago. It was the first night of a play called "Michael Strogoff"—an adaptation of Jules Verne's romance—at Booth's Theatre in Twenty-third Street. It was a big production with a fine and expensive cast, and a pretty good play into the bargain.

But for some reason or other everything went wrong with it, every incident in this melodrama that was intended to be taken seriously produced unbounded hilarity in the audience. The merriment began with the antics of a horse which had been ridden on to the stage by a General in full uniform; in the days of Smollett I could have described these antics, but our twentieth-century reticence (which seems confined entirely to print) will not allow me to do so. The climax came when Strogoff himself, after a desperate struggle with half a dozen soldiers or gendarmes—I forget which—threw them all down, darted into a droshky at the back of the stage, and, clasping to his heart the all-important despatch that had been entrusted to him, shouted to the driver:

"To the border."

The droshky was a curious contrivance, the front half rather like a four-wheeled cab, the back half like a bathing-machine. The sleepy driver had been lolling on the box behind an equally sleepy horse, taking not the slightest interest in Strogoff's adventures but sleeping peacefully on while the fight was taking place all round him. When Strogoff jumped into the bathing-machine, the driver whipped up his horse and moved briskly off—leaving the rear part of the contrivance, in which Strogoff was sitting, on the stage, apparently to await the appearance of more gendarmes after the curtain had come down.

"Michael Strogoff" never recovered from its first performance.

The only time that I personally was in a play which was—as the Americans say—"guyed," was at a special matinee in my very early days: these matinees took the place of the Sunday evening performances of the present time. It was a terrible play—like "Michael Strogoff," intended to be taken seriously—every word of which was greeted with roars of laughter. About the middle of the second Act the villain arrived on the scene. He was an old actor accustomed to playing villains, wearing a frock-coat, flannel trousers and beach shoes. Striking a melodramatic attitude in the centre of the stage and indulging in a comprehensive gesture which took in his whole surroundings, he cried in a stentorian voice:

"This scene is dreadful."

Barrie, Pinero, Carton, Lonsdale, have never in their lives written a line which provoked more mirth.

But to return.

About this time also came "The Cap and Bells" at the Little Theatre. This was an extremely witty

and clever comedy—I think I ought to have bracketed it with “The Tyranny of Tears” and “Women are so Serious” in my list of the very best I have played in. The author was Robert Vansittart, an official of the Foreign Office, and the stage was robbed of a brilliant dramatist by his devotion to his public duties. During the War he occupied a high and very responsible position in the Foreign Office, afterwards became Lord Curzon’s private secretary, and then private secretary to Mr. Baldwin when he was Prime Minister.

Lord Willoughby de Broke, a great friend of Vansittart’s, was the *deus ex machina* where the finances of “The Cap and Bells” were concerned. I went down to Compton Verney, Lord Willoughby’s beautiful Warwickshire seat, to spend a week-end with him and Vansittart, to discuss ways and means, and also, incidentally, to borrow the kit of a Master of Fox Hounds. I had to play a part in the piece which was a good deal like Lord Willoughby—he used to say that it reminded him very much of his own father. I was a certain Lord Chislehurst, M.F.H., and the play opened by my coming into the morning-room, just back from a day’s hunting. Obviously new clothes would have been very much out of place, so as I knew Lord Willoughby was a Master of Hounds and was more or less the same size as myself, I thought it would be a good idea to borrow one of his pink coats that had really experienced a certain amount of wear and tear.

I tried on the coat and waistcoat and they fitted me perfectly. The breeches and boots I left till bed-time. When everybody had retired and the whole house was shut up, I proceeded to try on the

boots before turning in. I had no difficulty in getting them on—but to save my life I couldn't get them off. For about half an hour I struggled with them, and eventually had to give it up as a bad job. The pain was intolerable (there is no pain so intense as that of a tight top-boot), and I started to hobble very slowly down a long corridor, in the vague hope that I might recognize Vansittart's door and induce him to help me rid myself of the infernal things.

I opened a great many bedroom doors in the next few minutes—one of which, I think, was Lady Willoughby's—and only after what seemed hours of toil and agony was I fortunate enough to strike the right room. With very little consideration for his beauty-sleep I succeeded in rousing Robert, and by a powerful united effort we freed my foot from its instrument of torture.

Miss Ethel Warwick was the heroine of "The Cap and Bells," Godfrey Tearle the hero, while my *vis-à-vis*, as the Countess, was my very dear old friend, Maude Millett, by this time a middle-aged married woman who, nevertheless, retained all her old-time brilliance. It has always been a mystery to me that the play was never done in America. I suppose it was thought that English politics would not appeal to American audiences.

One of the few legitimate actors of importance to appear on the music-hall stage at this time was George Alexander, who did a clever little one-act play, "A Social Success," by Max Beerbohm, at the Palace Theatre. Charles Lowne, Miss Kate Cutler and myself supported him. I think it was a little above the heads of the audiences of those days, but it went very well and was a new experience for all of us—

an experience which I personally was to repeat very successfully during the War.

Frank Tinney, the well-known American burnt-cork comedian, was on the bill also, and used to discuss our different personalities with his friend "Ernest." I played the Earl of something, and every night Tinney confided to Ernest that I wasn't a real "Oirl" but just an ordinary actor like himself.

"I know it for a fact," he used to say, "because I share his dressing-room."

This, of course, was fiction; but I suggested, to keep up the joke, that I should come on in the middle of his turn with my face covered with black and an indignant inquiry as to why he couldn't use his own towels. He was delighted with the idea, but for some reason or other—probably my intense desire to get out of the theatre as soon as I had done my bit—it never came off.

My interest in myself at this time began to take second place to another interest. My boy Geoffrey made his first appearance about now in a play at the Savoy called "A Cardinal's Romance," written by Edward G. Hemmerde, the well-known King's Counsel. Geoffrey had been intended for the Civil Service; he had taken a senior scholarship at Charterhouse, and everything had pointed to a career serious and academic. But it happened that in his last year he had written, produced and acted the principal part in an entertainment given at the school. It was a revue of the school and its masters; and the songs in it, of which he wrote the words, were set to music by Mr. Moore, the music master. The whole affair proved so enormously successful that the Civil Service



MR. FRED KERR'S SON, GEOFFREY



was incontinently abandoned, and his mind was made up—for the theatre.

No one will grudge me a little parental pride in recording his great success in his first professional engagement. The play itself was controversial and a failure, but the well-known critic, William Archer, ended his notice with the words:

“The only interesting feature of the evening was the bright and pleasant acting of Mr. Geoffrey Kerr, the son of Mr. Fred Kerr, who made, I understand, his first appearance on any stage.”

I was playing in the piece myself, but was quite delighted at being eclipsed by my own son.

Soon after this came the War, when everything was altered for all of us. Possibly no profession suffered more from it than that of the theatre, so I will devote my next chapter to the stage, as far as I knew it, during those drab and tragic four years.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WAR—AND SOME THEATRICAL INSTITUTIONS

WHEN the War broke out in the August of 1914, my son had been about a year on the stage and was acting with Gerald du Maurier at Wyndham's. I can't remember exactly what I was doing; but that doesn't matter much, for everything connected with the theatre seemed to be turned more or less inside out. In the very early days of the War the boy announced his intention of joining up; he had been in the rifle corps at school, and commanded a platoon in the artist training corps, which used to drill in the courtyard of the Royal Academy, so he had little difficulty in getting a commission in the Shropshire Light Infantry; and thus his stage career came to an end "for duration."

I, however, had reached a time of life which made it impossible for me to follow his example, and by way of keeping the pot boiling I bought a sketch from Charlie Hawtrey which I called "The Beautiful Mrs. Blaine." It had been written for Hawtrey by Monckton Hoffe, but Hawtrey had not played it because there were two almost equally good men parts, and to use his own words:

"You see, my dear fellow, I should like to do it with you, but Stoll and these music-hall managers

will only give me a certain amount, and it wouldn't be worth my while to pay your salary because, don't you see, it would practically come out of mine. But you can have the play, and I think it ought to be a great success."

It was a great success. I played it for nearly a year, straight on end, in all the principal variety theatres of the country. My agents were Norris and Clayton—the same Clayton, now a manager, who had been the chief Musketeer in my managerial days. It brought me into contact with a great many very interesting people: I had a feeling that the old "variety artiste" might resent the intrusion of the legitimate actor, but found it quite the reverse. No one could have been more "matey" and delightful to me than they were.

The playlet was produced at the old Metropolitan Music Hall in the Edgware Road. I recollect Norris and Clayton sitting in the stalls, very anxious about the effect that a smart West-End comedy might have upon the very unsophisticated and occasionally rowdy audience at the Metropolitan—an audience that was in the habit of marking its sense of boredom in no uncertain manner, and had been known to throw coppers, and even cabbages, on to the stage to performers of whom it had seen enough. However, "The Beautiful Mrs. Blaine" went splendidly, and the curtain was hardly down before I was bombarded with offers from other managers. These, of course, I handed over to Norris and Clayton, who arranged a long and, considering the war, very remunerative tour.

One of the first places on this tour was the Palace, Manchester, where I shared the top of the bill (as

the music-hall saying is) with Captain Woodward's performing sea-lions. I had with me a very good but rather nervous and fidgety actor, who was a great deal distressed at the perpetual noise of these beasts. Their tanks were situated at the back of the stage, and one of them used to keep up a running accompaniment of barking and coughing throughout the entire evening.

So one night when my colleague seemed particularly nervous, I introduced a "gag."

"Don't take any notice of it, old chap," I said. "It's only the housemaid; she's got tonsillitis."

At that moment the largest sea-lion of the troupe bellowed forth in its deep diapason.

"My God, she's given it to the butler!" was my comment. The roar of laughter from the audience gave my nervous friend time to recover his equanimity.

It was an extraordinary thing about this sketch that the rougher the audiences the better they seemed to like it. It went just as well at the Ardwick Empire as it had done at the Palace. The Ardwick Empire, however, was the scene of the only interruption I ever experienced. At the second house on Saturday night there was a most awful row in the gallery, which assumed such proportions that I left the stage and had the curtain rung down. Immediately the manager rushed round to see me, full of apologies. It appeared that a round of applause, which I had mistaken for an intentional interruption of my sketch, was merely the appreciation of the gallery at an heroic effort on the part of a very large and muscular policeman, who had grabbed a drunken man just as he was on the point of falling out of the gallery into the stalls. The policeman, having frus-

trated his effort, had lifted him on his shoulder above the heads of the neighbouring gallery-ites—and carried him out kicking and screaming, as easily as if he had been a baby in arms. I can quite imagine that this entertainment was more intriguing than my performance in “The Beautiful Mrs. Blaine.”

My earliest friends in the variety world were the Two Bobs, who were on the Metropolitan bill with me and whom I met in the same bill many times afterwards. Another was R. G. Knowles; he and I were together at the Hippodrome, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and on the last night of our week the manager of the theatre requested the pleasure of our company after the performance in order to tell us that we had beaten the receipts record for any previous week by the sum of eighteenpence. He was a most delightful creature, Knowles. A great traveller and a great raconteur, he used to give his entertainment until he had amassed a sufficient amount of money to enable him to chuck the stage and go off on his travels; when he had spent it he would come back to the halls, where he was always welcome.

When I took “The Beautiful Mrs. Blaine” to the Portsmouth Hippodrome, business had kept me in London until the last minute, and I was able to reach Portsmouth only very shortly before the first house began. I had just time to eat a horrible war dinner in a room where all the lights were shrouded in newspaper, and to deposit my suit-case in what I was assured was a nice quiet room. I had been very particular about choosing the room, for I had had a long day and was extremely tired. After the second house I went back to the hotel, had a bit of supper, which was as nasty as the dinner, and went

to bed. No sooner had I dropped off to sleep than I was awakened by the most awful noise I ever heard in my life. It seemed to be just outside my bedroom, so I put on a dressing-gown and went for the manager's blood. "Was a room next to a tram depôt his idea of a nice quiet room?" To my surprise I discovered everybody else on the same mission; but we came to the conclusion that perhaps the manager was not to blame after all, when we discovered the real nature of the noise.

It was a Zeppelin dropping bombs on the sands only a few yards off.

Not long afterwards, when I was playing at the London Coliseum, I just escaped a very unpleasant meeting with a bomb. The warning had been given and the maroons had gone off, and George Graves and myself, who were both playing sketches at the Coliseum that evening, had discussed what was the best thing to do as to getting home after the performance. Then a man came in through the stage door and announced the "All clear." Thinking the air-raid at an end, I walked round to St. Martin's Church, and climbed on to a 33 'bus to drive back to my home in Kensington. As we travelled westward along Piccadilly I noticed that the searchlights at Hyde Park Corner were very busy—and searching the ground along Piccadilly instead of the sky. Then I discovered that the "All clear" warning had been premature, and that the celebrated Piccadilly Circus bomb had been dropped not more than a minute after my 'bus had left the Circus—as a matter of fact it was the last 'bus to leave before the bomb was dropped.

The air-raids had a most curious effect upon many

of us actors. I don't think it ever occurred to most of us to be frightened, but the raids used to make us extremely angry. They seemed to be specially arranged to interfere with our activities; and this feeling of intense irritability was shared by the policeman on duty at Knightsbridge, whom I met one night when I was not sure whether a raid was or was not completely over.

"I think," said the policeman testily, "I think it'd serve them b——y 'Uns right if we took reprizzles."

And all the way home I was trying to think in what part of Russia the village of Reprizzles was situated—till it occurred to me he meant reprisals.

There is no need to remind my readers of the difficulties of travelling in wartime, but I would like to point out to them that the actor on tour probably felt those difficulties as much as anybody. There were no porters and no cabs. I reduced my luggage to a couple of suit-cases, which I used to drag off to the waiting-room to be fetched by the hotel porter. Trains were always late and usually crowded—in fact, travelling in general seemed like a nightmare.

I recall one journey, on a Sunday, from Newcastle to Liverpool. We travelled by a train which divided somewhere or other, half of it going to Liverpool, the other half to Manchester. I was careful to make every enquiry before starting as to which section I and my party must travel by, and we were put by an important official into what he assured us was the Liverpool half.

At about half-past seven that evening we were deposited on the Manchester platform!

My fury was indescribable. I was blandly informed by the officials at Manchester that if I waited

two hours, I might catch a train to my proper destination; but they made not the slightest attempt at excusing or explaining their Newcastle man's dunder-headed mistake. Taking the law into my own hands, I drove my Company to the Midland Hotel, where we all had a very good dinner (and where, incidentally, I ran into George Alexander, who was playing in Manchester that week). We then drove back to the station, and finally arrived at Liverpool in the middle of the night.

I charged the Railway Company with the whole of the expenses their carelessness had put me to, and am glad to say that after a little initial squirming they paid the bill with not too bad a grace.

As I have said, everything seemed topsy-turvy during the war. The theatres were at their wits' end as it became more and more evident that the only plays that young soldiers home on leave would take to were the absolutely irresponsible song-and-dance kind of entertainment—I suppose that kind of entertainment made it easier for them to forget the horrors they had been passing through abroad. When things were at the worst I produced for Cyril Maude a very charming little farcical comedy called "The Young Idea"; it ran, I think, for a week. The fate of Pinero's play "The Freaks" I have already described. Nothing that was worth while seemed to interest the public, and I was very glad to fall back on my sketch and to revert to the Variety Theatres, which gave me unbounded hospitality, and which I shall always look back upon with gratitude.

In the legitimate theatre, my luck seemed to be dead out; mine was not the "line of business" that was much in demand during the war, and when my

sketch had been played all over the country, I looked in vain for another good one to follow it.

I went on one short tour with my old friend Lewis Waller. I played for less than half my usual salary, and even then Waller was stretching a point in my favour, but I was very glad of any way of filling in my time and keeping the flag flying, and we had a good deal of fun on that tour, and lots of golf.

Poor old Waller's fondness for golf brought the tour to a tragic close. We had been playing in the morning—Harry Lauder was one of the party—and in the afternoon had promised to go out to a neighbouring hospital to assist at an entertainment for wounded soldiers. When we arrived at the hospital Waller said to me:

"D'you mind if I get my recitation over quickly and go home. Someone will give you a lift. I don't feel very well."

I didn't see him again until the evening performance. His teeth were chattering, and he was shivering with all the outward and visible signs of a violent attack of influenza. Somehow or other he managed to get through his part, went straight off to bed—and never again left it. Although it was summer-time, he had caught a very severe chill while playing golf; the chill rapidly turned to pneumonia, and in spite of his being a picture of health and strength, he succumbed three or four days later.

I saw him just before we left Nottingham, where the illness occurred. He seemed bright and cheerful, and I certainly thought that a few more days in bed would put him right and that he would rejoin us in Glasgow, our next port of call. On the Monday



morning after our arrival in Glasgow I walked round to the theatre to learn of his progress; and there I found Clarence Hirst, our business manager, terribly upset. Poor Waller had died in the night.

We managed to struggle on without him for a week or two, but, of course, his death practically brought the tour to an end.

He was a very fine character, and we were all exceedingly fond of him. The mantle of Terriss had seemed to descend upon him, but good fellow though Terriss was, Waller was a better; I am speaking of his character, not his acting abilities. As an example of his kindness of heart, there was a small actor in our Company, who had been with him a very long time and who at regular intervals used to get uproariously tipsy. Rather more drunk than usual one night during the performance, he upset a whole tray of coffee over Madge Titherage, our leading lady, and completely ruined not only her dress but the whole scene which was in progress.

After the act, Waller sent for the culprit—as he had done many times before.

“This,” we all said, “must surely be the end. He has overlooked his delinquencies from pure good nature so many times, but this time—no! This must be the end.”

After ten minutes’ interview, the culprit came out of Waller’s dressing-room with a satisfied smile on his countenance, having been forgiven, and having succeeded in borrowing a couple of pounds.

Such was Waller.

On looking back, I suppose that those years of war were, for all of us, the most trying we have ever experienced. One’s personal discomforts seemed of

little or no consequence beside one's anxiety about the boys who were "out there." My own boy had left the Shropshires—my old and gallant friend, Robert Loraine, had been conducting flying operations at short distance from where Geoffrey was stationed, and had taken him up for a flight. After which, nothing would suit Geoffrey but a transfer to the Flying Corps.

And then came a letter from the pilot of the machine to which Geoffrey was observer, saying that although my son had been badly wounded he was in no danger and would probably be sent to England almost at once. The shock of this letter was the greater since it preceded by six hours the official notification from the War Office. But he duly arrived, much to our relief; and his mother and I were spared further anxiety by his being gazetted unfit for flying service owing to wounds. He was then appointed an instructor of aerial gunnery with the rank of Captain, a post which he filled until the war was at an end.

So much for the war. It is by no means a congenial subject to write about; but before entering upon the post-war period, I should like to "reminisce" a little on some theatrical institutions—such as the Actors' Association, the New York Actors' Equity and the Actors' Benevolent Fund both here and in America.

The Actors' Association was formed a good many years ago with a very worthy object—to put down abuses, such as bogus managers, insanitary dressing-rooms and so on. But these objects included also some which seemed dangerous. The Association met, however, with whole-hearted support from those

of us who, like myself, had arrived at a point where we were not, humanly speaking, very likely to be benefited personally. And then gradually differences of opinion began to assert themselves; with the result that I, in common with many others, withdrew from the Association, as its policy seemed to be getting perilously near that of Bolshevism.

When I was a young man reading for the Bar, I used to study Stuart Mill, who had a great deal to say in his work on Political Economy about the survival of the fittest. I gathered from him that it was entirely the reverse of kindness to encourage the incompetent by imposing all sorts of tiresome regulations on the managements. Still, the Association succeeded in getting a standard contract generally accepted, which contract emanated in the first instance from Sidney Valentine. Valentine was one of the best and largest-hearted of fellows, who didn't mind giving a lot of time and trouble to the amelioration of the lot of the smaller fry: I shall always have recollections of him of the most friendly and affectionate nature, but I differed from his politics regarding the theatre.

For instance, I could not see eye to eye with him, or with the ruling body of the Association, as to actors being paid for rehearsals. In every other profession the beginner has to lay out money for his education, whether it be Law, Physic, Divinity—or even trade. He has to go through a novitiate and a training, before he can pass the examination or whatever qualification test may be considered necessary to admit him to his future calling. When the Actors' Association was in its infancy, Henry Irving—a veritable prince in his open-handedness

and in the generosity of his management—was asked after supper at the Garrick Club when I was present, what he thought about this very question.

“In my opinion,” he replied after a moment’s consideration, “a great many actors ought to pay very highly for what they learn at rehearsals.”

This puts my conviction in a nutshell. I have never forgotten those words, and I have never ceased to believe that they were both wise and practical. The young actor in my early days had to rough it—and the very hardships he went through were of use to him afterwards. I cannot for the life of me see the common sense of making things easier in a profession as easy already as that of the theatre. It is a grossly overcrowded profession, and for myself I should welcome a movement for restricting its members, instead of paving the way for any Tom, Dick or Harry to increase the overcrowding.

Again, I always objected very strongly to classing actors as mechanics. If our calling has any classification it is surely that of a profession, and nobody who is unable to take care of himself has any business to be in it. As long as the Actors’ Association confined itself to putting down legitimate abuses, it was doing useful work; but when it turned itself into a Trade Union I lost all sympathy with it.

The Stage Guild, which was founded a year or two ago, is largely supported by prominent members of the profession, and is a kind of practical protest against the Socialistic tendencies of the Actors’ Association. It is based on much more reputable and respectable aims and methods than the latter; but I still wonder whether any institution is possible, or, for that matter, necessary, to protect the interests

of a profession of free-lances, of which it seems to me only the fittest can survive in any event.

I cannot help feeling that these views of mine represent me as a very hard-hearted and uncharitable person. I am neither the one nor the other. I have the greatest sympathy for real actors and actresses who, through ill-health or other misfortunes, have fallen upon evil days. There exists an institution called the Actors' Benevolent Fund, which would benefit extremely if the rank and file of the profession took as great an interest in others as they do in their own tuppenny-ha'penny "rights." The Actors' Benevolent Fund has done a great work for many years in helping actors—and when I say actors, I of course include actresses—who are in temporary trouble. The applications for relief are kindly and unobtrusively, but none the less thoroughly, scrutinized, and assistance is invariably given to those who are worthy of it. It derives its income chiefly from funds which have accumulated from legacies, public dinners, benefit performances and so on—funds which have been very sparsely contributed to by the large majority of the profession. I don't think the public mind being called upon now and then to assist an actors' charity, for no one in the world is quite as prodigal in his charity to others as the actor; which makes it more curious that his own charities, such as the Actors' Benevolent Fund, should be the only ones to which he does not offer a helping hand.

I served on the Committee of the Fund for several years, and if all actors had the same personal experience as I had of the good which the Fund is really doing, I fancy they would come forward much more readily with their subscriptions.

Most of what I have said about the Actors' Association in England seems to me to apply to the Equity in New York. Things were worse in America before it was founded than they had been over here, and I have nothing but respect for the way in which it asserted itself and succeeded in abolishing the prevalent abuses. The Equity nowadays is a much more powerful body than the Actors' Association, and every actor in the United States is compelled, to all intents and purposes, to join it. Personally, however, I cannot bring myself to agree with being forced to join a Trade Union; all that I have said about the survival of the fittest seems to apply just as much in America as in England, and in America the stage is almost more overcrowded than it is on this side of the "pond."

They do everything on a bigger scale than we do, and their Theatrical Fund, under the enterprising presidency of my old friend Dan Frohman, is a magnificent institution, splendidly organized and supported. It puts our half-hearted efforts with the Actors' Benevolent Fund to shame, and I think it would be a very good thing if our Committee were to take counsel and advice from some of the Americans connected with the American Fund—advice which I feel sure they would be only too willing to give.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CLUBS AND CLUBMEN

SOON after I was married, Tree founded the Academy of Dramatic Art, which still flourishes in Gower Street. George Bancroft, Sir Squire's son, was the first manager of it, and I was one of the original teachers. It was interesting work, but I gave it up after a year or so, because I couldn't get away from the feeling that every pupil who had paid his or her fee was equally entitled to the teacher's interest. This was obviously impossible; out of a class of thirty or forty, perhaps some half a dozen might eventually manage to make a living on the stage, and one or two at the outside might achieve some real success. It was inevitable that the clever ones should receive most of our attention; and I wish that the Academy could be made self-supporting so that there would be no fee, and admittance only obtained by examination. Then the difficulty I speak of would cease to exist.

I am often asked whether I consider the Academy a good training-ground for young actors. Unhesitatingly I answer, Yes. It is not merely a good beginning; it seems to me almost the only way in which young people can get the practical knowledge of the stage which they used to do in the old "stock" days. In the schools they are taught fencing, deport-

ment and all manner of necessary things, besides being perpetually rehearsed in plays of every sort and description. The novice out for experience, who gets an engagement to play a footman or to understudy on a six-months' tour, finds as a matter of fact that he has no more experience at the end of that time than he had at the beginning. Had he been at the Academy, he would have been trying his hand in a tremendous variety of parts and been kept continually at work in the right direction.

There are, of course, other schools of acting besides the Academy—my old friend Miss Kate Rorke has been for a long time conducting one, so has Lady Benson, and Miss Fay Compton has recently started another. Nor must I forget my own sister-in-law, Miss Rosina Filippi, who, in addition to being a teacher at the Academy at the same time as myself, was indefatigable in conducting classes of her own, from which sprang many of the more promising young people of to-day's stage. In the absence of the old stock company, in which actors used to learn their business, I strongly recommend such schools as the best possible training-grounds.

Another teacher at the Academy in my time was Mme. Cavalazzi, the great *première danseuse*, who married Colonel Mapleson, the operatic impresario. She used to teach ballet dancing—than whom none could do it better—and she used always to call to my mind a certain gem of dramatic criticism.

As she approached middle age, she generally played the part of a tourist, or some male rôle, which enabled her to make her entrance, in the middle of the ballet in knickerbockers, a Homburg hat, with a pair of field-glasses. A very big woman, her entrance was



invariably extremely dignified and effective; and having made her entrance, she would carry on by means of weird pantomimic gestures an animated conversation with one of the other characters. This conversation might doubtless have been interesting to anyone who was able to fathom its meaning; but for myself I never knew whether she was saying that it was a nice day or asking for change for half a crown.

Max Beerbohm, in those days dramatic critic to the *Saturday Review*, once described a ballet at the Alhambra in which she appeared.

"Enter Cavalazzi, the immense, the inscrutable," he wrote; and in those few words he said more than most critics would have done in an equal number of pages.

All that I have said up to now seems to me very, very long ago—yes, even though I have recently been talking about the War and my own son's entry upon the stage. Stories of the dead and gone keep coming back to me. . . .

Stories about Irving, for instance, are endless; but I don't know whether the one has ever been told in print about his celebrated speech at a dinner given in London to a number of American actors who were playing here at the time. There were, among others, as far as I remember, Edwin Booth, Gillett, John T. Raymond, Billy Florence, and last but not least, Nat Goodwin. After Irving had said a great deal about American acting in general and about its present representatives in particular, mentioning them all by name, he showed signs of sitting down without having referred to Nat Goodwin—who was undoubtedly New York's principal comedian. One of the diners noticed this lapse, and scribbled the words "Nat

Goodwin" on a piece of paper, which he handed to a waiter with instructions to slip it into Sir Henry's hand before he had time to resume his seat. Irving, engaged on a very eloquent peroration, became aware that somebody was touching his back, and, putting his hand behind him to remove the obstruction, safely received the bit of paper.

Unfortunately he could not for some moments find his eyeglasses, which in their playful, after-dinner fashion had hidden themselves behind his back. But he evidently guessed that something was wrong with his speech, so while searching frantically for the missing glasses he improvised as follows:

"Of course, there is one guest with us to-night—a man we are always—always delighted to have among us—er—whose name is a household word—household word in both hemispheres—I need hardly say that I allude to—my dear old friend"—here he found his glasses and took a hasty glance at the paper—"my dear old friend—Nit Godwin."

I remember another dinner at which Irving took the chair, given to the great Italian tragedian Salvini. In reply to the toast of his health, which had been proposed in the most felicitous terms by Irving himself, Salvini rose to his feet and poured forth volumes of the choicest Italian in a voice which could only be compared to a cathedral organ. Magnificent in appearance, he declaimed his periods to an audience which sat spellbound, though they did not understand a single word. When Salvini spoke it did not seem necessary to understand him.

At last he sat down, the close of his speech greeted with a tempest of applause. As the cheers and the clapping gradually subsided, a little Italian, rather

like a Soho restaurateur, got up from somewhere beneath Salvini's elbow, made a profound obeisance to the chairman and to the company in general and said:

"Mistaire Salvini, 'e say 'e t'ank you vera moch."

Irving was always rather funny on the subject of America. I remember his telling me of an episode that happened at Philadelphia. To use his words:

"I was acting in Philadelphia, and I was invited by a man called Wagner—the Pullman King, I think he was—to have supper with him after the performance one night. I never go out to supper, so I declined, thanking him all the same. But he said it would not be a party—just a few friends and a glass of champagne—and he was so hospitable and friendly that in the end I couldn't refuse, and went to the supper.

"When I got there I found my worst anticipations realized—a hundred guests—dress-clothes, a banquet, and—speeches. A man got up to propose my health, and made a very long speech, which was entirely devoted to the great successes of the Philadelphian actor, Edwin Forrest. He gave us a long biographical sketch of Forrest, and never made the slightest allusion to my existence. I was the guest of the evening, I didn't think it was in very good taste. However, there was nothing for it but to return thanks, which I did by saying that I had been very much interested in hearing all about Mr. Forrest's idiosyncrasies, but that, as far as I was concerned, my old friend Booth was good enough for me. And with that I scored and sat down."

This story he told me at very great length in a bunker on the Sheringham Golf Links, where he had been studying his part in a play written by his son

Laurence. He had been doing so at the imminent risk of his life—I myself had only just missed him with a low drive which barely cleared his head. When I discovered that the figure which rose slowly out of the bunker was none other than the great man himself, I went to say how-d’you-do, to apologize for nearly killing him, and to suggest that he might find some other spot a safer refuge. He kept me talking for a quarter of an hour, and that story came into the conversation.

It had an amusing sequel.

He had already told it to Sir John Hare, with whom I was just starting for an American tour. When Hare and I were in Philadelphia shortly afterwards, the Clover Club, a great Philadelphian institution, gave a dinner at the Belle Vue Hotel, to which we were invited. We had to leave early because of the performance, but on returning to the hotel, in which we were both staying, we found the Clover Club still carrying on the good work; it seemed, in fact, that when we rejoined them we were the only, strictly speaking, sober men in the room. They welcomed our return, and a very pompous and important-looking elderly gentleman rose to his feet.

“Mr. Hare,” he said, “I think it might interest you to hear a few particulars about our great Philadelphian tragedian, Edwin Forrest.”

Hare and I kicked each other under the table: it was Irving’s friend! He discoursed at immense length about Forrest, and concluded:

“Your friend, Sir Henry Irving, was in Philadelphia some little while ago. I told him about Mr. Forrest. He thanked me very much.”

In his later days, Irving used to tell interminably

long stories. My wife and I dined with him and Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Trower one evening during this same visit to Sheringham; and there Irving began a story which I am positive would never have finished at all, had not Mrs. Trower shown unmistakable signs of extreme exhaustion and finally retired to bed.

Recollections of those pre-war days would hardly be complete without some reference to the Duke of Beaufort.

He was a delightful old man, very distinguished in appearance, charming and old-world in manner, and devoted to the stage. I can see him now dispensing hospitality at the Corinthian Club, a very jolly night-club of the days when a night-club *was* a club and not a disguised restaurant. It had its being in the premises which are now occupied by the Sports Club.

I remember the old Duke, too, at a banquet which the profession gave in honour of Joe Knight, the doyen of dramatic critics; in proposing Joe's health he made use of a particularly happy phrase in allusion to the guest's professional reputation.

"Our guest," he said, "whenever he has to use the lash, instead of whipcord uses silk."

Another time I went with my wife to the Comedy Theatre to see a play by Sardou—it was a great failure, redeemed only by a very beautiful performance by Marion Terry. The Duke was sitting next to us, and at the end of Miss Terry's scene the tears were rolling down his nose.

"My boy," he said to me, "they told me this was a damned bad play. I'd come every night for a week to see a bit of acting like that."

Just such a one as the Duke of Beaufort was Lord Londesborough, an ardent follower of all things

dramatic, whose drag, whether at Epsom or at Lords, was open house to the hosts of actors fortunate enough to know him. There were few of us in that happy circle who did not receive in the course of the season a brace of pheasants and a hare, or a dozen gulls' eggs, with Lord Londesborough's compliments.

Mention of the Corinthian Club reminds me of another club of a very different character, which had a short but merry life at roughly the same period. Cyril Maude, Willie Elliott and myself met each other casually one day at the top of St. James's Street. We went into the Devonshire Club—of which I have been a member for a great many years—to have a whisky and soda; and as we chatted together one of us remarked what a pity it was that we met so seldom; incidentally, I may say that besides having been at Charterhouse with Cyril Maude I was at Cambridge with Willie Elliott. The idea was then mooted that we should have supper together once a month, and it was suggested that there were others, friends of more or less the same kidney, who might be invited to join the coterie.

The qualifications for membership were some sort of position, not necessarily a big one, on the stage, and a public school or University upbringing. Having found twenty-two men we all agreed upon, we invited them to join us—which they all did—and we chose for ourselves the name of the Twenty-Two Club. In electing a President we made a wise choice: Arthur Cecil, a considerably older man than most of us, a great *bon viveur*, very fond of and very popular with the younger set. He was delighted to be approached in the matter, and to become chairman

at our feasts. We had no rules, the understanding being that an invitation to membership of the Club must come unanimously from all the existing members.

I acted as Hon. Secretary, and among the twenty-two were Forbes Robertson, Charlie Hawtrey, Brookfield, Arthur Bouchier, Willie Herbert, Charlie Allen, Arthur Elwood and, of course, our three selves. We used to sup in a private room on an upstairs floor at Rule's in Maiden Lane, and the whole affair was a most enjoyable and indeed triumphant success. But it died a natural death, as these things generally do in the absence of a business-like and salaried secretary, who really attends to his duties.

The entire absence of formality and the intimacy of all its members with each other always makes that kind of club a very cheery institution. There exists a similar but much more important one than the Twenty-Two Club in the Kinsmen—a Club of which the members are mostly men of letters, artists and actors, roughly half English and half American. The Hon. Secretary at the time I joined them was Seymour Trower; he had an immense number of friends in theatrical circles, the Club was his Benjamin, and he worked indefatigably in its interests.

The American Ambassador is ex-officio President of the Kinsmen, and many is the time that I had the pleasure of meeting that splendid character, Joseph Choate. It is almost impossible to describe him: in him seemed to be blended almost all the good qualities which can be associated in any one individual. With a fine appearance and a beautiful voice were united a knowledge of the world, a kindliness and urbanity, a most delightful sense of humour and a keen wit. Good-fellowship seemed to ooze out of his whole

being; and when he eventually left England, though his place in this country was filled by another very delightful man, Mr. Whitelaw Reid, we of the Kinsmen never quite got over his loss. I recollect someone asking me what kind of a man Whitelaw Reid was, and my answering him:

"He takes infinite pains to make you think he is as good a fellow as Choate was."

Choate, like many of his countrymen, was an extraordinarily fine after-dinner speaker, and his speeches were always models of good English and good style. It has always seemed to me such a pity that the American nation doesn't fashion its speech upon that of the best of its own people; you can hear no better English than that spoken by some of America's orators—or worse English than that of the large majority of the American people. American post-prandial speakers take more interest in their job than ours do, and as their great ones, such as Choate and Chauncey Depew, pass away, their places are filled by others—such as my friend Patrick Murphy, whose utterances are gems of oratory and imagery. He it was who in the course of a speech on imagination declared that "a woman's principal asset is a man's imagination."

Talking of after-dinner speaking reminds me of a rather happy effort of Lord Birkenhead's. Before he left the country on his last tour, poor old Arthur Bouchier invited a number of his old friends to lunch at Claridge's Hotel to wish them *au revoir*. Unhappily, it turned out to be farewell, for we none of us saw his cheery face again.

There were some amusing speeches on that occasion, among them one by J. H. Thomas, who alluded to



Bourchier's well-known Parliamentary ambitions. Bourchier's sympathies were with the Labour Party, and Thomas declared that, after a talk with MacDonald, they had agreed that on Bourchier's return from his tour he should be taken into the Government, and a special portfolio created for him as Minister of the Drama. A moment later it was Lord Birkenhead's turn to speak.

"I am afraid," he said, "that there is something wrong with Mr. Thomas's hearing. Bourchier in his speech has specifically stated that he is only going away for two years."

The Kinsmen carried on in New York as well as in London, but the club there gradually underwent a decline and a natural death—possibly for the same reason that the Twenty-Two Club did here. On one of my visits to America I made some attempt at reviving it, but the only two Kinsmen beside myself seemed to be Professor Brander Matthews, one of the founders of the Club, and John Drew, and we agreed that resuscitation would be practically impossible.

To go through a list of the members of the Kinsmen would be to recite the names of many of the foremost men of art and letters both in America and Great Britain. Such names as Abbey, Sargent, Sir David Murray and Alfred Parsons among painters, and Irving, Hare, Bancroft and Drew among actors, are but samples. The Kinsmen still thrive in England—and may they long continue to do so.

Of less importance but no less amusing are the band of brothers who call themselves the Tatlers. The Tatlers are more Bohemian than the Kinsmen, and their qualification for membership depends not so

much upon artistic or literary position as upon capacity for good fellowship united to a hearty appetite. I used to dine pretty frequently with both these Clubs; but there comes a time when one has regretfully to give up late hours.

A club to which I have belonged for more years than it is necessary to number is the Devonshire. It was started between fifty and sixty years ago as a kind of Chapel-of-ease or understudy to the Reform, much the same as the Junior Carlton is to the Carlton. It was a Liberal Club, and when I first joined it such distinguished statesmen as Sir William Harcourt and Joseph Chamberlain were frequently to be found lunching or dining there. My father used often to dine there as the guest of Sir Matthew Joyce, the Chancery Judge, and he always held the opinion that the Devonshire had the best cook and the best cellar in London.

My father, Sir Matthew Joyce, Sir Charles Pontifex (the Indian Judge) and Binns-Smith, a Master of the Supreme Court, were inseparable friends. Charles Pontifex was a remarkable instance of the fact that skill in games often goes hand in hand with eminence in more serious pursuits. After having captained the Cambridge Eleven he went to the Bar; and then, of course, his first-class cricket days were over. (That is one of the reasons why Bill Yardley held that baseball was a better game than cricket). So he became a really excellent tennis player, and as he grew older was equally good at golf and croquet. He used to act as junior to my father in his Privy Council cases; in due course he was appointed judge in Calcutta, and on his retirement became Councillor to the Indian Government at home.

I remember a Privy Council case in which Sir

William Harcourt led my father's side against Sir Henry James on the other. It was a terribly dull case, dealing with what is known legally as "estovers and bote"—a tenant's right to cut fuel on his landlord's property. With such a hopelessly dull subject Sir William Harcourt could not very well do otherwise than make a dull speech; so Sir Henry James, by way of livening up the proceedings, bombarded his with irrelevant questions and remarks—of which Sir William took no notice of any sort or kind.

In the course of this speech, as was inevitable, the word "grass" kept on cropping up, and at last Sir Henry outdid himself with this fatuous interpolation: "All flesh is grass."

Sir William appeared to notice him for the first time.

"I should think yours is hay, Sir Henry. You're so dry," he said.

As children we were always brought up to call Sir Charles Pontifex Charlie, and Charlie he remained till the day of his death, which occurred not so many years ago. The fourth member of the quartette of old friends is Binns-Smith—an amazing creature. The stage lost a good comedian when he decided upon the Law as a profession. His chief characteristic was an all-embracing smile; this smile was in perpetual evidence, since its owner saw the comic side of everything to a degree I have never seen equalled. He was taking a man into lunch one day at the Law Institution in Chancery Lane. In the hall of the Institution hangs an enormous picture, considerably above life size, of a stark naked man; members usually allude to it as The Bare Trustee. The guest asked Binns-Smith what it might represent.

"That," replied Binns-Smith without the slightest hesitation, "is the portrait of a successful litigant leaving the offices of Messrs. Gregory."

When he was appointed a Master of the Supreme Court, he showed my brother over his official premises at the Law Courts. With almost childish delight he pointed out all the comforts and luxuries of his new surroundings. Opening the small door of a piece of furniture containing what the crossword puzzles call "a vessel" and for which I know no polite name, he beamed at my brother and said:

"You see, Her Gracious Majesty thinks of everything!"

The Devonshire Club has gone through many vicissitudes which have been enlarged upon in a very interesting book by my late lamented friend, H. T. Waddy. He traces its history from the old days when it was Crockford's, through all its ramifications, to its fiftieth year. Waddy himself was a most lovable and popular man, a metropolitan magistrate, absolutely overflowing with the milk of human kindness. His delightful sense of humour came to the rescue of many of the culprits who were brought up before him in his magisterial capacity. I remember a villainous looking couple, to all appearances having just concluded a sanguinary battle, appearing in his Court on a charge of "drunk and disorderly."

"What have these people been doing?" inquired Waddy of the constable concerned in the case.

The policeman jerked his thumb at the woman—a terrible virago in tattered clothes, with a black eye, and a man's cloth cap for head-dress.

"If you please, Your Worship," he said, "the woman 'ere 'as been leadin' a gay life."

"Don't put such silly ideas into her head," returned Waddy, as he proceeded to deal with the couple in the most lenient manner possible.

Another time, on a very hot afternoon, he suggested to an extremely stout and prosperous-looking tradesman, charged with some criminal offence, whose case would not come before him for an hour or two, that he might take a seat. Upon which a fussy little solicitor jumped up and said:

"I think your Worship ought to know that in his own town my client is a man of very considerable importance."

"He can still sit down," was Waddy's rejoinder.

It has always been a mystery to me how clubs like the Devonshire manage to survive the War and its effects. The subscription at most London Clubs used to be ten guineas a year; this was supposed to cover all overhead expenses, so that members could get everything they wanted inside the Club at more or less cost price. Within recent times prices have risen between 250 and 300 per cent; but Club subscriptions have never been raised more than 50 per cent. I remember all our anxieties at the Devonshire—I was a member of the Committee during that period—and I am inclined to think it is Bridge that has come to the rescue of a great many Clubs. In almost every Club throughout the length and breadth of the country you will find the bridge player more in evidence and more solicitously catered for than any other member.

We had a wonderful chairman of Committee at the Devonshire during the War—Sir David Brynmor-Jones, a man of very distinguished appearance and of delightful manners. A Privy Councillor and a Mem-

ber of Parliament, he was thoroughly conversant with the procedure of Westminster—a great asset in a Chairman. I can see him now blandly informing a grumbling member burning to ventilate a grievance at the Annual General Meeting:

“You are not in order. We shall be able to listen to you a little later. But at the moment you are not in order.”

A gentle rebuke which usually had the effect of rendering the recalcitrant member dumb throughout the rest of the proceedings.

Irving was a member of the Devonshire when I first joined it, but he left it, I think, because supper appealed to him more than dinner.

Amongst other old members of the Club who have gone from us was Lord Blyth, who served on the Committee at the same time as myself and who, together with myself and another, constituted the Wine Committee. Lord Blyth had probably forgotten more about Port and Brandy than anybody else had ever known, and it was a liberal education to see him take up a glass of port which we were sampling with a view to purchase, smell it, look at it, eventually take two or three drops of it on to his tongue, and spit it out—for he seldom or never drank port—with the laconic and perfectly accurate remark:

“Cockburn’s 96.”

I suppose his extraordinary knowledge of wines is to a large extent responsible for the very great prosperity and popularity of the firm of Gilbey, of which he was for so many years the principal Director.

And then there was that remarkable old man, of whom we were all very fond, John Hill—Uncle

John to all his friends; he died only the other day at the age of eighty-four. A retired London banker, and in his youth a great sportsman, he used to ride on horseback every day from his house in Highgate to his bank at Smithfield, and return every evening in the same manner. In appearance he was rather like an old print, and as age crept upon him he spent most of his time at the Club, except on summer afternoons, when he was generally to be found at Lord's or the Oval. He was quite an institution at the Devonshire, and possessed an unerring instinct in Port, second only to Lord Blyth, of whom he was practically contemporary in point of years. But it was his very acute memory that interested me, particularly as it embraced old-time theatrical lore. He remembered all about the early days of the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, off Tottenham Court Road, and I had the happy idea of getting him and Sir Squire Bancroft to meet each other at luncheon. They were men of the same age, who had many of the same interests in life, and nothing could have been more amusing than their conversation about people and events of over half a century ago. To this day, members of the Devonshire seldom sit at lunch in the chair which old John Hill occupied for so many years.

Still another old member I recollect very well was George R. Sims—"Tatcho" as we used to call him—the well-known playwright, journalist and inventor of a preparation, which he named "Tatcho," for preserving the hair. He was an encyclopædia of information on all the inner side of London, its life and its inhabitants, and was a most entertaining companion.

I remember, when I was rehearsing his play "A Woman in the Case" at the Court Theatre, his asking my wife if she had a motor-car—motors were not so common then as now.

"Oh no," answered my wife, "We've three children and can't afford a car."

"I see. Too much Kerr and too little motor," was Sim's instant retort.

I don't quote that as a very witty or profound remark, but it is rather characteristic of Tatcho's curious gift for enlivening the commonplaces of conversation.

In this respect he always reminded me of a great-uncle of mine who lived in Norfolk, and whose idea of humour was to make the most horrible puns all day long and on every conceivable subject. He came down to breakfast one morning, and as soon as he entered the room said to my mother, who was pouring out the tea:

"Mary, my dear, have you heard my last?"

"I wish I had," was my mother's heartfelt reply.

On one occasion, when he was out shooting with his brother (a man who really did possess a sense of humour), he made a more than ordinarily bad pun.

"Frank, my boy," he cried out in delight, "make that remark at dinner this evening and I'll get my joke in. It might go very well—make 'em laugh, you know."

There was a large party at dinner that night, and in the middle of a long pause, the elder brother, Frank, rose to his feet.

"My brother William," he began solemnly, "has asked me to make the following remark . . ."



A fine opening for William's carefully rehearsed funniment !

Ranelagh is another Club of which I have been a member for a great many years. I was a member before the days of Sir George Hastings' management, when it was—though a cheery place—always in the last stages of impecuniosity. I remember the time when golf was first played there and was the occasion of considerable friction between the golfers and the polo players—for whom Ranelagh as a club chiefly existed. The polo players used to gallop their ponies over the putting greens and leave their remounts on the psychological spot where a sliced drive was sure to go—and a great many drives were sliced. Thus a feud was inaugurated which seemed likely to become perpetual; when suddenly the brothers Peat, who were perhaps the greatest polo players of their day and the mainspring of Ranelagh polo, took to golf—at which, by the way, they became very good—and created a sympathetic atmosphere between the two games, which have been played side by side ever since then with a perfect mutual understanding.

Sir George Hastings took over this almost bankrupt Club, and its present popularity and success is due more than anything else to his unique gift for organization.

There remains only the Garrick Club to mention. I did not join it till rather late in life, and I have so many friends there that it would not be fitting for me to talk about it. But I may perhaps be permitted to refer to the recent death of Sir Squire Bancroft.

At the time of his passing he could almost be said to have been the father of the Club. I do not think I have ever known a man whose accustomed chair

seemed so empty as B.'s (as we used to call him) after he had left it. He was a very old friend of mine, as also was Lady Bancroft, and my affection and respect for them both were boundless. On my return from my last trip to America, when I entered the Club I was given a note from Sir Squire and a copy of his last book *Empty Chairs*. The note said how sorry he was to be out of town, but he hoped to see me soon. In the meantime, as he was not feeling very well, he had gone to stay at Bath for a few days.

I never saw him again. About a week after writing that letter he was brought back to London a dying man, and passed away in his rooms in the Albany, where he had lived ever since the death of his wife, and where he used to dispense the most delightful hospitality to his many friends.

His oracular pronouncements on things in general were always wise, with never a grain of malice in them. They were tinged with a certain sort of reflective humour which seemed to belong to him alone; but perhaps his most lovable characteristic was his intense sympathy and feeling for the younger members of the dramatic profession. His kindness to myself began when I was quite a tyro—and it never varied.

A typical instance of his constant interest in us youngsters—for so we must most of us have been in his estimation—was shown me when, having had a rather foolish tiff with Gerald du Maurier, we had made up our differences and shaken hands. It happened that just at this time I asked B. to dine with me. In accepting the invitation, he added:

“May I say how delighted I am to hear that you and Gerald have buried the hatchet.”

It was characteristic of the man to take to heart any differences among his friends. They were all friends of his, and as such ought to be friends of each other.

It is quite impossible for me, or for anyone even, to begin to appreciate the loss that the stage has sustained in the death of such men as Bancroft, Irving, Wyndham, Hare—and Toole, who were the undisputed heads of the profession when I first joined it. They were all such big men that it never occurred to them to treat young people otherwise than with kindness and courtesy.

Poor old Johnny Toole, of whom I have said nothing so far, was in a way the most remarkable of the four. He was what is known as a low comedian—he had a low comedian's face and figure; comicality was written all over him. But whenever he had to appear side by side with one of his great contemporaries—as, for instance, as an expert witness in a theatrical lawsuit—not Irving or anyone else could outdo Toole's amazing natural dignity. Those barristers who thought that they were going to get some fun out of Toole in the witness-box were very much mistaken, and he always showed conclusively that the comedian could be just as responsible and dignified a citizen as the tragedian.

I shall never forget Toole's first game of poker at the Green Room Club. I stood behind his chair and explained the value of his respective hands as they were dealt him. At last he was given four Queens. Instinct told him that they were of very considerable worth, and his acting as he disguised the contents of his hand was inimitable—and so effective, that he brought off a big *coup* from another and less fortunate player who held three Aces.

## CLUBS AND CLUBMEN

These five men were figureheads and worthy of all the respect and esteem in which they were held. Old-world courtliness and kindness has died with them.

## CHAPTER XV

### SINCE THE WAR

WITH the end of the War, began an entirely new order, and the troubles and anxieties of the actor seemed to be intensified. The theatres had mostly fallen into the hands of speculating profiteers, and the expenses of running them gave the manager little chance of making both ends meet. Salaries too had gone up as a natural sequel to the rise in price of every sort of commodity; the actor who used to get £10 a week now got £20, and was a poorer man on the £20 than he had been on the £10. It is more than amazing to look back forty-five years to the time when I was passing rich and kept a horse on a salary of £6 a week.

Soon after the War, Claude Carton, in collaboration with Justin Huntley McCarthy, wrote a play called "Nurse Benson," to which I have already alluded. It was produced by Anthony Prinsep at the Globe Theatre, with Marie Lohr as the heroine and Lottie Venne in the part of a war-profiteer's good-humoured and vulgar spouse. Lottie Venne was the female Peter Pan of the stage, and in this play she seemed to be just the same woman as she had been in the days when I first met her playing Mrs. John Wood's part in "The Magistrate" at the old Court Theatre, while Mrs. Wood was on her holiday. Her name in

that part was Mrs. Poskett, and as Miss Venne was about half Mrs. Wood's size I christened her Little Mrs. Poskett—and to me she always remained as such.

Her recent death has taken another landmark from us. In its extraordinary finish, her acting was like a Birket-Foster drawing. She left nothing to chance, and her art was such that her performance always seemed to be absolutely spontaneous. She was a great little comedienne, and as far as I know there is no one to take her place.

Poor Dawson Milward was also in the cast. The play had a long and very successful run, in the middle of which Tony Prinsep and Marie Lohr decided to give a matinee performance of Rostand's "L'Aiglon"—the very last play in the world, I should have thought, to make any appeal to an audience at that time almost entirely given over to revue and musical comedy; however, Miss Lohr made a very great success of it. She asked me to play a part in the piece and I was much too fond of her to refuse, but I reminded her that I was an old man and did not feel capable of grappling with the words of a very long part just for one performance. So it was agreed between us that I should play the small but important one of General Something-or-other—the name I forget. The part consisted of about six lines, five of which were absolutely unimportant, while in the sixth was contained the essence of the whole scene in which I made my appearance. I spoke the five unimportant lines with perfect success, and entirely forgot the one important one—which should serve as a warning that it is not wise to tax too severely the memory of actors over sixty years of age.

During this engagement a war film was being made, in which Marie Lohr played the heroine and Matheson Lang the hero.

Inasmuch as my memory did not seem in danger of being strained, I played the part of Matheson Lang's father. Peace was signed at Versailles, however, and the film was never exhibited; but it was one of my very few incursions on to the screen.

As an old actor I am perpetually invited to tell people what I think of the cinema, and whether I believe the cinema does much harm to the stage.

I have never been able to pump up the slightest interest in the cinema beyond my admiration for and astonishment at its photographic conjuring tricks. To photograph at such a pace that movement can be recorded seems to me an astounding feat, but my appreciation of the result is entirely confined to such films as those showing penguins and other curiosities of Nature. I hate seeing *Mary-Cutting-Father's-Corns* and *The Cowboy's Nightmare* and all the absurdities which the cinema is responsible for. Nor for the life of me can I share the enthusiasm of the majority of the public for well-known film stars, and I intensely resent their being invariably alluded to as actors and actresses.

Surely the term actor can only be applied to people who have proved themselves to have speaking voices. In this connection I welcome the recent announcement that the films of the future will be talking films. I presume this means synchronization of film and gramophone; but whatever it may mean, one thing is certain—that the actor will come into his own and become of some real importance at Hollywood. I don't for one moment wish it to be thought that I am

disparaging the cinema as a profession. People take up a profession to make money, and I know of no profession in which they can make more; therefore, it is a good profession. But if only we could be spared the ravings of the Press about its artistry!

There can be little doubt that the cheaper parts of the theatre have suffered considerably from the popularity of the cinema; it is regrettable, though unavoidable. But theatres would make a much better fight for themselves if only they were half as comfortable as most picture-houses are. As a rule on a visit to a picture-house—and this applies more perhaps to America than to England—I have thoroughly enjoyed the comfortable seat and the orchestra, and if I have hated the picture I have at least been able to sleep at my ease.

It was soon after "Nurse Benson" had finished its successful run that A. E. Thomas, the American dramatist, wrote an extremely charming play, the title of which was "Just Suppose." It dealt with the Prince of Wales' extraordinary popularity in America, and had for its theme an imaginary episode occurring during the Prince's visit. The Prince was represented as a rather harum-scarum but thoroughly delightful character, and I have always thought that no one would have liked better to see the play than their Majesties.

Of course, it could not have been done in England; there is an unwritten law which prohibits the presentation on our stage of anything connected with the reigning Royal Family. But the Prince was never alluded to as the Prince of Wales, nor were the King and Queen of England ever spoken of; and it was only after reading it and recognizing the entire



absence of anything in the slightest degree disrespectful or disloyal that I consented to play in it, and advised my son to do so, too.

He had been offered the part of the young Prince—a part for which by reason of his age and appearance he was eminently suited. I played an elderly diplomat, who was by way of being bear-leader to him. The play was produced in New York by my old friend Henry Miller and proved an enormous success. Old Mrs. Whiffen, who might almost be said to be the mother of the American stage, was a delightful old lady in Virginia, in whose house the Prince stayed for some days, incognito.

It was my job as the diplomat to find out where he was and bring him back to his public duties. When, having discovered his whereabouts, I asked him why he had given us all the slip, he said, "I was bored."

I replied, "As a man who has been bored for sixty years, may I respectfully inquire, what of it?"

When the play had finished its run, I came back to England to play in "The Grain of Mustard Seed," written by H. M. Harwood. Harwood at that time was the author of several successful plays, one of which I had already played in—a piece called "Please Help Emily," a very amusing play produced by Gladys Cooper and Charlie Hawtrey. In "The Grain of Mustard Seed" Harwood really "arrived." I remember that the *Times* began its notice:

"For sheer brilliancy of writing, Mr. Harwood's play at the Ambassadors' Theatre is a rare refreshment."

I was in the Garrick Club one morning when Harwood and Norman McKinnel (who was producing



MISS CATHLEEN NESBITT AND MR. FRED KERR IN "THE GRAIN OF  
MUSTARD SEED" (1920)



the piece) came and asked me to play in it. It was already in rehearsal; they gave me the script to read, and I said I would let them know my decision tomorrow. The next day I told them I didn't think the play could possibly have any money in it—it was much too subtle—but that it was so good I should like to be connected with it, even if it did not live very long. To the astonishment of all of us (including, I fancy, Harwood himself) it was an enormous success and had a very considerable run.

Politics was its theme. Instead of action, we sat about in armchairs chatting—principally about politics. And what made it so absorbing was the fact, of which probably few of the audience were aware, that the author himself is the son of a well-known Member of Parliament for Bolton, and the words that he put into the mouths of such characters as McKinnel and myself played, were absolutely authentic. The *Times* concludes its notice:

“Altogether it is an evening for the theatrical epicure. It is delightful for its constant ripple of wit, its thrusts at the weaknesses of politicians, its neat air of mundane wisdom, its general elegance of style.”

I have made many attempts to get an American manager to produce the play in New York. But as in the case of “The Cap and Bells,” they fight shy of it on account of its British politics. Probably in writing my part Harwood had Lord Balfour in his mind—an old patrician whose life had been spent in playing the game of politics. I shall always remember one speech I had in the play; how when I was a boy it had always been my great ambition to be a 'bus driver; but later I had discovered that

'bus drivers didn't choose their own routes and their own stopping places, but were merely servants, and what they had to do was to get through the traffic with the minimum of accidents. Government, I had to add, was very like 'bus driving.

Parts often seem to go in sequences, and my next part was that of another politician—Prince Soctykoff, the Chancellor of Russia at the time of Catherine the Great. "The Czarina" was the name of the play, and it was produced in New York by Gilbert Miller, the son of my old friend Henry Miller, as a vehicle for Miss Doris Keane, who had failed to find a worthy successor to "Romance." The original play was written by two Hungarians, and was translated into English by Edgar Sheldon, the author of "Romance"; it had a considerable success in New York, although its run there was not a long one.

When we were playing "The Czarina" in Washington, Miss Keane and I had the honour and the pleasure of being presented to President Harding. He was a strikingly fine-looking man with very delightful manners, and I was interested to find that he had a favourite actor. That actor was Willard—whose popularity in America almost exceeded his popularity in this country. As a young man Willard always played villains and, like James Beveridge, another "villain" in his youth, he was really of quite the opposite disposition, and they were both far more fitted, both by appearance and inclination, for the benevolent parts with which their maturer years were associated.

This interview with the President took place in the White House. It must be a terrible penalty of greatness to have to shake hands with hundreds of people

every day and pretend to be pleased to see them. But such is the President's fate; and no one could have carried it through more graciously than did Mr. Harding.

Earlier in this book I remarked that New York had a disconcerting habit of changing its appearance every five years or so; and the differences between the New York of my early days and that of the present time are absolutely bewildering. For instance, when I was playing in "The Czarina" I used to have my supper at Brown's Chop House, which since my first acquaintance with it had moved up-town from Sixteenth Street to Fortieth Street, and was presided over, not by that hundred-per-cent. American, dear old Mr. Brown, who looked exactly like an English butler, but by a German. The Chop House has now ceased to exist—another old landmark fallen victim to Prohibition.

Everything seems to have moved up-town. Whereas in my early days Union Square was the centre of the theatrical world, and Madison Square quite a walk away from one's usual haunts, nowadays Times Square is the heart of everything theatrical, and I do not suppose that the ordinary actor gets as far down-town as Union Square any more often than the London actor visits the British Museum. I have a sort of idea that this centre of theatrical activity will soon shift again—this time to Fifty-ninth Street. It shows a tendency already to continue its up-town progress. "Excelsior" would have been a good motto for New York City.

The enormous apartment houses on Riverside Drive stand on ground which, when I first knew it, was occupied by pigstys. Although I never suc-

ceeded in making any money worth speaking about, I always had good ideas as to how to make it—ideas which I was not lucky enough, or perhaps pushing enough, to bring off. I can remember as well as if it were yesterday, a Sunday afternoon walk of forty-eight years ago. It took me and my companion along the side of the Hudson River, and looking at a squatter's hut with its inevitable ash-barrel situated about where Eightieth Street would be now, I said:

"I wish I had a couple of thousand pounds; I should like to buy this spot. New York can only grow in this direction, and one of these days this bit of ground will be priceless."

If I had had the means of buying it, you, my readers, would have been spared this book of recollections.

Fifth Avenue, once consisting of nothing but beautiful houses and vacant spaces, the residential stronghold of the Four Hundred, is now a sort of Piccadilly, all shops and clubs. And Fifty-ninth Street, which used to be the end of all things, is now more or less in the middle of the City.

The actor in New York still has a link with the downtown past in the Players' Club. The Players' Club was presented to the profession by the great Edwin Booth, who was to a large extent to New York what Irving was to London. It is situated in one of those rare corners which seem to belong to another world. Grammercy Park is the picturesque name of this picturesque neighbourhood, and the Club is a delightful one, in which most of the old and worthiest theatrical traditions are maintained. When I was last in New York, dear old John Drew was the President.

Another very old institution connected with the

stage is the Little-Church-around-the-Corner. The legend is that a somewhat haughty clerical dignitary once refused to entertain the idea of burying an actor. When asked where the poor man could find quiet burial,

"There is a little church round the corner," said he, "where I expect you could get it done."

This is the Church of the Transfiguration, and its close connection with the stage for so many years is the outcome of that story—which may or may not be true.

My lot just now was cast a good deal among Americans, for on returning to England, C. B. Cochran engaged me to play in an American farcical comedy called "So this is London." It had had a very great success in New York under the auspices of George Cohan, and in London its success was just as great. There were two star parts in the piece, one of which was mine, while the other was played by Edward Robins, an American actor who came over for the purpose. It was a jolly experience all round, and a most comfortable engagement. After Robins' return to New York I went on tour with the play under the management of my old friend Robert Courtneidge.

Robins and I hit it off extremely well as the two Dromios, and although our parts were up against each other I don't think we had the slightest friction throughout the whole of the run. My sixty-fifth birthday took place while the piece was running, and Robins celebrated it by giving a party at the Metropole Hotel. A good many of our mutual friends were there, including my wife and daughters, and we had an uproariously jolly evening.

George M. Cohan himself came to London about



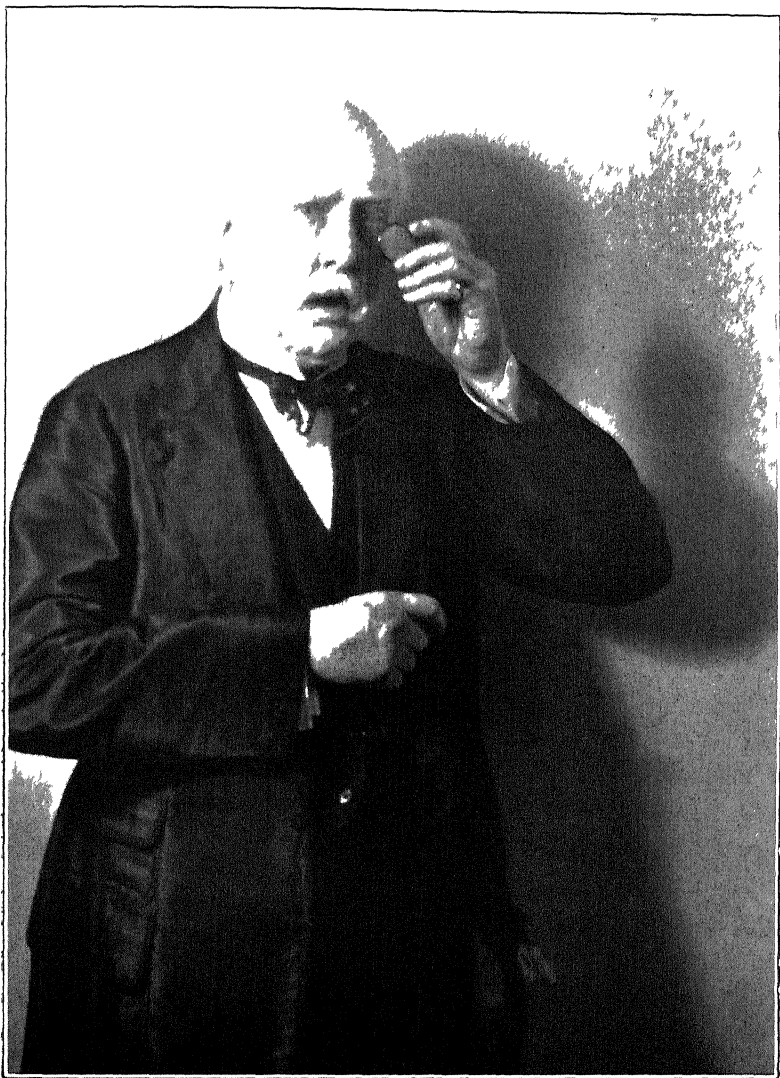
this time to produce his own musical play, "Little Nelly Kelly," of which I saw the dress rehearsal. During it occurred one of those interminable waits that seem to be almost essential to musical comedy rehearsals. The wait became longer and longer, more and more trying to the nerves of the unfortunate actor on the stage, and to the temper of the stage manager. Most producers would have been foaming at the mouth with inarticulate rage; not so Cohan, who endeared himself to me for ever by saying to the stranded actor:

"Say, son, can't you give us a song an' dance while we're waitin'?"

If one takes in the true significance of that incident, one is in a fair way to understanding George Cohan's phenomenal success in life.

As far as I personally was concerned, these last few years seem to have been a sort of battledore and shuttlecock between London and New York. After playing in another play of Harwood's—"The Pelican"—a very good play but hardly as good in my estimation as "The Grain of Mustard Seed"—I went back to America to produce the piece for the New York manager, A. H. Woods, and to play my original character. And while I was fulfilling this engagement I fell into the one piece of real bad luck I have ever experienced.

I had just finished "The Pelican" and opened in "Magda." After an interval of more than twenty years I was again playing Colonel Schwartz to the Magda this time of Madame Kalisch instead of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. We opened at a Brooklyn Theatre, and on the third night I was driving home with Henry Stephenson, who was playing the Pastor. It was very



MR FRID KURR AS SIR JOHN HLRIOT IN "THE PELICAN,"  
ACTS 1 AND 3 (1922)



wet, and the cab was a battered old contraption driven by a stupid-looking negro youth. Going over the Williamsburgh Bridge at about thirty miles an hour in the pouring rain, we skidded right across the road at exactly the same moment as a Buick which was just in front of us. The two cars hit each other to such purpose that they broke five of my ribs and one of Stephenson's—apparently, I had been sitting on the business side.

Without being actually knocked out, we were both of us unable to speak for ten or twelve minutes. At length Stephenson gasped:

"Are you hurt?"

I said: "Yes. Are you?"

He said: "I think so."

I said: "D'you think a little Scotch whisky would do us good?"

Stephenson's eyes lit up at the suggestion. With great difficulty I got my hand into my coat pocket—to find it full of broken glass: all that remained of my flask!

No policeman seemed to be within miles—they were probably taking refuge from the rain. We were too much damaged to notice the numbers of the cars, and were only too glad to be put into another taxi with a very good driver—a very obliging and respectable man—in every way a contrast to our own disreputable Jehu, whom I have never seen or heard of since. We were taken to a hospital in New York and examined by a young doctor, who, thoroughly disgruntled at having been fetched out of bed, wound me round with a bit of adhesive plaster, said he didn't think there was much the matter, and sent me home.

I shall never quite know how Stephenson—who

must have been suffering very considerably himself, though only in the ratio of one to five—got me up to my apartment in the Wentworth Hotel, or how I managed to undress myself and crawl into bed. Once there, however, I remained there for six weeks or so; and it is only through the ministrations of an extraordinarily able doctor, Dr. Jacobi, the nursing and care of my wife, who fortunately for me was accompanying me on this tour, and a very strong constitution, that I was able to pull through what I fancy they all thought would be the end of me.

The whole episode was a disaster of the first magnitude to me, and although I made a remarkable recovery, it was a long time before I was fit for work again. It cost me also a terrible lot of money; for not only did a fine salary automatically cease but I was put to fearful expense in doctors, specialists, hotel accommodation and all the accompaniments of a sick-bed at its most costly.

However, though I am not now quite as active as I used to be (for which the accident can only partly be blamed), I am quite amazingly free from the disabling after-effects which might have fallen to my lot. So perhaps I mustn't grumble.

I was just becoming convalescent when Sir Alfred Butt cabled to me a request to come back to London and play in "Conflict," Miles Malleson's piece, which would probably have had a longer run but for the General Strike. In such an atmosphere of disturbance as that which a General Strike produces, I think the actor suffers quite as much as anyone, especially if he happens to have only just recovered from a severe illness, as I had done. Theatres are to all intents and purposes empty, and in an emergency of this kind

actors generally assist managers to keep them open by allowing a considerable percentage to be taken off their salaries; and they have to face great difficulties and discomforts in getting home from their work after the evening performance. Although it is like a nightmare to me, I cannot help feeling very glad that the General Strike took place, for it conclusively showed us that in spite of Trade Unions and their monstrous theory that the best man's work must be limited by the abilities of the most unskilled—a thing which they do not perhaps acknowledge, but which is really behind every strike—England was by no means ripe for Bolshevism.

Little that has happened to me since that time is of any particular interest, so I will merely chronicle the fact that I played in another American play called "The Gold Diggers" by Avery Hopwood (who recently met with a tragic death in France), and that I have just finished in this country another adventure with Lonsdale's "The High Road," in which I am shortly making yet one more American appearance.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GREAT ACTING v. GOOD ACTING

THERE are two questions which I have been asked scores of times but have always been unable to answer definitely—"who was the greatest actor or actress you ever saw?" and "what do you think constitutes a great actor?"

In the last half century I have seen most of the celebrated actors and actresses—Sarah Bernhardt, Coquelin, Lucien Guitry among the French; Duse, Salvini and Rossi among the Italians; several big German actors; the Sicilians when they were over in this country, and Jefferson, Clara Morris and Edwin Booth of the American stage. Of our own I have seen Ellen Terry, Mrs. Kendal, Mrs. John Wood, Lady Bancroft, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Irving, Wyndham, and very many others, and have acted with most of them; and I find it almost impossible to cast a vote in favour of any one of them. Such an actor as David James would certainly be in the running; was anything quite so perfect as his Butterman in "Our Boys"? Or was anything ever better than John Hare's Benjamin Goldfinch in "A Pair of Spectacles"? One thinks of all the magnificent performances one has seen, and feels the impossibility of making a choice between them.

Possibly, however, if I were pressed for a decision,

I should select Nelly Farren. Her genius was unique. Her lines were cast in the world of burlesque, but no one who saw her as little Nell could doubt that her command of pathos was as great as it was of comedy. Moreover, in nearly all her parts she was making bricks without straw: all those other people I have mentioned were given good parts to play, but hers was entirely a success of personality combined with astounding ability. It is interesting to me to recall a conversation I once had on this very subject with Sir Squire Bancroft. He was inclined to take the same view as myself; and both of us bracketed her with Lady Bancroft and Mrs. John Wood as the best comedienues within our recollection. The only reason I give the palm to Nelly Farren is that whereas the other two played parts written by Robertson, Pinero *et hoc genus omne*, poor Nelly had to wrestle with authors whose chief pretension to wit consisted in the facility with which they made bad puns.

Not that I wish to depreciate burlesque, which was great fun—especially when you had a Nelly Farren to serve it up to you, to say nothing of Edward Terry, Royce, and Kate Vaughan. As a quartette they have never ever been approached. I say this with all respect to the clever and beautiful young ladies who are carrying on in the musical revues, which are the burlesque's successors.

It is always difficult to say exactly what constitutes a great actor. Obviously the term is not synonymous with that of good actor; how many good actors could have been great if only they had had the opportunity it is impossible to say. No one can be admitted within the small and select circle of "great" actors,



as the word is generally accepted, unless he has made his mark in Shakespeare or Sheridan.

Among great actors of my recollection—using the term in its ordinary sense—I should be inclined to rank old Mr. Jefferson highest. In doing so I shall inevitably be told that Jefferson did nothing for the stage to be compared with the contributions of Irving and Edwin Booth. But I do not think that the work a man does comes into the argument; the result, the finished product, is all that one can concern oneself with. And Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle* and his *Bob Acres*, were two performances so absolutely perfect that no other actor has ever succeeded in convincing me that he was quite as great an actor as was Joe Jefferson.

He was so good in those parts that his public would allow him to play no others and his stage work was limited in consequence. For my own part I place all the actors I have spoken of more or less in the same category; but there was one I never felt quite sure about—and that was Salvini. He was endowed with an extraordinarily fine appearance and a magnificent voice; how much of his success was due to these gifts of nature and how much to his brains I am unable to determine. I remember as a very young man saying to Clayton that Salvini was lucky in having a voice like a church organ—this at a time when Clayton was raving about Salvini's *Othello*.

"I suppose," said Clayton, "you think you could play *Othello* as well as Salvini."

"No," I replied, "but I could play it a damn sight better than Salvini could play *Captain Vale*."

Captain Vale was the part I was playing at the moment in "*The Magistrate*."

There was another actor very inferior to Salvini in size, voice and distinction—Rossi, an Italian, who was some years Salvini's senior and from whom, it was said, Salvini had learned his business. Rossi was extraordinarily good, but I have always wondered whether British and American audiences would have appreciated him so fervently if they had understood what he was saying. Once while I was in New York I saw Rossi play King Lear in Italian, the whole of the rest of the Company speaking English. There was a moment in the play when he too broke into English, and declaimed:

"Ayee everghy eench aie Kieng."

I don't think that an actor can possibly be great without having a sense of humour; and this was apparently denied to Rossi.

I remember in the music hall at Brighton, in the very old days, the performance of a sketch by the Celebrated Tragedian, Professor Somebody-or-Other, supported by his Talented Son, William, and his charming Daughter, Marie. The Professor's part was something like the miser in "*Les Cloches de Corneville*," an intensely dramatic rôle, representing him as an octogenarian scoundrel who had murdered most of his near relations, including his brother, on whose money he was now living.

He employed his brother's orphan children as office boy and household drudge respectively. The play had this much resemblance to real life, that most criminals are brought to justice through some piece of gross carelessness on their own part. And so, having satisfactorily stolen the money, the old rascal left his brother's will lying about in a small open basket on the table, with the result that when the niece was

sweeping the room she knocked over the basket and tumbled the will out of its very inadequate hiding place. The nephew, happening to come into the room at the psychological moment, picked up the will and read it; his youthful mind instantly grasped the situation and he showed the document to his sister. The peculiarity of the sister's part, I may say, was that she never spoke—during the whole of the twenty minutes or so which the sketch lasted she did not open her mouth till the very last line.

The miser, having apparently remembered that he had neglected to lock up the will, returned to the room—to find the children looking horribly guilty. Moreover the basket was empty. With all the intensity of Irving, Salvini and Edwin Booth combined into one gorgeous gesture of hate and fury, he pointed a bony finger at the boy and hissed out the single word:

“Scorpion!”

This was the girl's cue for her one and only remark:

“Nao,” she said, “hit is yew that hare the scorpion, for you 'ave stolen my farther's money!”

Upon which the miser fell dead and the curtain descended.

I could not help thinking Rossi's performance of King Lear more or less on all fours with this one of the Professor's.

So long as there remains a stage and actors, the topic, who was the greatest actor, will always crop up. Fortunately for actors, it will never be decided—thank goodness we don't all think alike.

Still more difficult is it to answer the question, “What constitutes great acting?” I have already said that actors can only enter the ranks of the great by

way of Shakespeare and Sheridan; but I have always doubted whether the really best acting is what the world at large designates great acting. I have never been able to subscribe to the theory that tragedy is greater than comedy, or a tragedian *qua* tragedian a greater actor than the comedian. I have seen all these "great" actors play what people are pleased to call great parts, but I question whether any of them was quite as good as Mrs. Gaston Murray, who used to play at the St. James's Theatre in the days of Hare and Kendal, and before then, I fancy at the Prince of Wales' with the Bancrofts. In my younger days I saw her play a duchess, a rector's wife with a perpetual cold, and a charwoman; she was absolutely perfect in each and, in fact, in everything she did, and I can't quite see why the word great should be withheld from such an actress as she was. She would probably have made a magnificent Lady Macbeth—but I suppose she was the last person in the world whom any manager would have selected for the part.

Superlatively good acting—which seems to me a much more reasonable description than great acting—comes almost invariably from comedians. Irving was a comedian, so was Ellen Terry, so was Dame Madge Kendal, so, of course, were Lady Bancroft, Clayton and Mrs. John Wood, and in my humble judgment it is ridiculous to compare the cast-iron "great" performances of a Salvini or a Rossi with the much more flexible and human representations of their "lesser" contemporaries.

Only the other day when I was last in New York, I saw a performance given by a young actor of the name of Nugent, which seemed to me to merit the title of "great" in just as high a degree as did any

of those others. He played the principal part in a rather silly play so extraordinarily well and so absolutely naturally, that I am convinced that Hamlet and all the parts usually recognized as "great" are well within his reach. He had to represent an intensely serious young man undergoing all sorts of adventures and humiliations, from which he emerged triumphantly at the finish; and not for one moment did he show the slightest consciousness of any absurdity in his farcical career.

Looking back over the past fifty years, I am inclined to think that a great deal of nonsense has always been talked about "great" acting. Great parts make great actors, and I fancy that the modern stage could produce just as many great actors as the stage of years ago, if only there were to be found authors who could provide them with great parts.

I have talked in this book a lot about myself, a subject of which I hope my readers are not as tired as I am. I have been on the whole a very lucky man in other respects besides acting. I was lucky in my parents and I have been very lucky in my wife and children. For five-and-thirty years my wife has been my best friend, and my children have never given me the least anxiety. My son has been for some years in New York, where he has married the very charming and popular young actress who is known to the public as June Walker. In America the young actor is so much better paid than in this country that I can only feel my son is doing the best for himself by staying there.

I myself, having been so much in America and knowing the American stage so well, feel nothing but regret for the unfortunate strain that has lately mani-

fested itself between American and British actors. Although an Englishman, I am by rights an American actor, for I first went on the stage in America, and it never occurred to me till recently that there could be any opposition to the inhabitants of the one country playing in the other, any more than to an artist selling in England a picture he has painted in New York. I am very conservative both by nature and by upbringing, and I trace all these disturbances to the Labour Party, Trade Unions and other modern monstrosities. Our own Government seems to me to place itself in an utterly ridiculous position when the Minister of Labour vetoes the engagement in London of a young American actress, on the ground that she was preventing the employment of an English girl. One can hardly wonder at the Americans retaliating; but the whole affair appears to me so utterly childish and indefensible that I can't trust myself to write about it with moderation.

The day is gone when the actor was classed among the rogues and vagabonds; and surely those Actors' Associations and Equities, which exist for the ostensible purpose of helping actors, have done them a very poor turn in persuading the British Government to treat artists from the other side as if they were agricultural labourers, and in making them report themselves to the police as if they were in the country with some criminal intent. Judging from the present state of affairs in London, half our theatres would be empty if it were not for American plays and American actors. If the public likes them better than native produce, give the English author and actor a chance to fight them fairly, let the rivalry be conducted in a friendly manner, and let the best side win. Why on

earth the Government should interfere will always remain a mystery to me.

My elder daughter, who was for a short time on the stage, married and left it some few years ago. Her first appearance was made under the auspices of my old friend George Alexander just before the War. When the War was over she returned to the theatre, and was playing my daughter in "So This is London" when she met her future husband, Lord Talbot de Malahide; he was already slightly connected with us from the fact that a near relative of his had married one of my nephews. My daughter Joyce and I went over to see him at Malahide Castle when we were in Dublin; and the outcome of that visit was a very pretty wedding which took place at Tickencote in Rutlandshire.

Her mother and I had been married from the house of my wife's sister Mrs. Worsley, who after the death of her first husband married C. B. Marriott, K.C. History repeated itself inasmuch as my daughter was also married from Mr. and Mrs. Marriott's place, Tickencote Hall. Although she was a very promising young actress, she never really liked the stage and I think has no regrets at having left it. She is now chatelaine of Malahide Castle, a beautiful relic of Norman architecture and said to be the oldest inhabited castle in the British Isles, and is the mistress of a very fine family of Irish wolf-hounds.

My younger daughter, Molly, is of too modern a date to occupy much space in a book of recollections and reminiscences. Her connection with the theatre is an after-the-war experience; during the War she spent most of her youthful time dressed up as a Boy Scout! She is doing remarkably well on the stage,



LADY TALBOT DE MALAHIDE  
Mr Fred Kerr's eldest daughter



MALAHIDE CASTLE, DUBLIN





for which she has great talents; and taking them for all in all, I may reasonably express a considerable amount of pride in my three children.

The trend of the stage is always changing. At the moment the crook play has come into its own after every form of adultery has been exploited. As for sex plays I frankly detest them, and I am old-fashioned enough to resent the nature of many parts which young actresses are called upon to play nowadays, in plays in which subjects are dealt with very frankly that could not even have been mentioned in any mixed society when I was a boy. I am quite aware that many people regard this so-called emancipation as a matter for congratulation; I can only say that I do not, but I take comfort in the conviction that a good clean comedy is still the most potent magnet towards the box-office.

As things go, the time for my retirement from the stage ought to be at hand; but I shall go on for as long as I can remember things and get about. As poor old George Huntley used to say:

"I've been getting my living all my life by remembering things."

And unfortunately an actor seldom saves enough money to live in any great comfort after his retirement. It is always hard for him when he is earning, say £10 a week, to realize that this sum doesn't necessarily mean £500 a year. A play may run for twenty weeks—but for the next twenty he may be kicking his heels; and it is very difficult to save money out of anything as precarious as an actor's salary.

He would be wise to keep his eye on the inevitable approach of old age, and the necessity of having at

least a competence to live on when he can no longer earn. I am reminded of the story concerning a certain old lady, a friend of my mother's. She was a very wise and pious old woman, though she had hardly any money and lived in a labourer's cottage. She was grande dame, and without her accolade no new-comers to the district were admitted to the sacred circle of County society. Every night she used to pray for a competence, finishing her prayer with the words:

"For fear, O Lord, Thou shouldst not know what a competence is, I mean £300 a year, paid quarterly."

That, I suggest, would be an appropriate prayer for actors to include in their devotions.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MORE NEW YORK

I AM told that my book is not long enough for commercial purposes, but I can only add to it by referring to the American trip from which I have just returned. And in speaking of America, I feel more or less in the position of the journalist who was sent by an evening paper to Madame Tussaud's to write an article on the waxworks. He wandered about the exhibition, but could think of no earthly thing to say that hadn't been said a hundred times before. Then suddenly he had a brain-wave—the laundry of Madame Tussaud's, a hitherto unexplored field for the newspaper pen. He obtained the name and address of the laundress, an old lady living in the Notting Dale district. She had washed for the exhibition for twenty-five years, she told him.

"Then," said the journalist, "you can tell me something that would be of great interest to our readers. Do the great ladies, the queens and duchesses among the waxworks, wear anything beneath their gorgeous velvet robes?"

"Well," answered the old lady, "as a matter of fact they don't. But I'd rather you didn't make it public, because nobody knows it except me and a few Australian soldiers."

I find it difficult to say anything new about America.

All that I have said before might be multiplied by ten "and then some" to use their own vernacular. New York has become an almost impossible place to live in. Apartment houses spring up incessantly, and where there used to be one house, with one family and one equipage, you now have a building which contains sixty families, each of which possesses one, two or more motor-cars, the consequence being an almost unbelievable traffic congestion. For instance, one day after rehearsal I took two of our ladies to lunch at an hotel which was barely five minutes' walk from the theatre. We had to be back at the theatre at half-past two. At 2.20 it began to rain, so we got into a taxi; at three o'clock we were still sitting in the taxi, and by reason of the roundabout traffic system, were rather further from the theatre than when we had started.

If a person living in any street between Fifty-ninth and Thirty-second Streets wants to call upon a friend in the next street, whose back-yard touches his own, he can walk round in something under a minute. But if it is raining and he takes a cab, he has to go a mile out and a mile back to get to the house, as he is not allowed to turn a corner until he gets to Ninth Avenue, he living within a few yards of Fifth Avenue.

The extraordinary part of it all is, to me, that in spite of the terrible difficulties of getting to and from the theatre, the New York public are as enthusiastic playgoers as ever; and for many weeks it was well-nigh impossible to book a seat to see "The High Road," Fred Lonsdale's last great success, in which I was playing my original part.

On this tour, Lonsdale produced his own play, and returned to England immediately afterwards.

It was very hot during most of the time we were rehearsing, and I remember him arriving one evening, looking very clean and cool in a thin dinner-jacket with a soft shirt and no waistcoat. Some tough females on Broadway asked him satirically, "Who the hell did he think he was, anyway?"

To which, lifting his hat, with an urbane smile, he replied,

"A passenger by the *Berengaria* to-morrow."

The crowd on Broadway, round about Times Square, is incredible. Add to this crowd the strident loud-speaker situated in the middle of the Square, bawling out election or baseball results, or some long speech by Mr. Al Smith, and you get a pandemonium which it is impossible to describe adequately. And yet there is delightful country above and beyond New York—on Long Island, where I paid a visit to my son, who had taken a house there for the summer, it was as peaceful and pleasant as any English village.

I find myself in a constant state of amazement that people are able to live in New York and retain some semblance of sanity. The police manage the traffic in an autocratic but eminently efficient manner, and I think that our own authorities—those especially who are in any way connected with traffic control round about Piccadilly Circus—would do well to pay a visit to New York and learn something of the methods that have been adopted there. There is never the slightest difficulty in crossing a New York street, if one only waits for the signal, whereas in Piccadilly Circus one takes one's life in one's hand whenever one steps off the pavement. I remember asking a policeman in the middle of Piccadilly Circus whether any provision whatever was made for pedestrians, and

he suggested that the safest way of crossing the street would be by aeroplane!

Some adventurous friends of mine inform me that there is now an underground method of circumventing Piccadilly Circus, but I have not yet had the courage to make myself acquainted with it.

Truly the Americans are an amazing people. I remember a voluble English actress, who was monopolizing a conversation, turning to Mark Twain, who had taken her in to dinner, with that same remark, "You Americans are an amazing people."

"A very patient people," replied Mark Twain, a little sadly.

And they are a very patient people, because they put up with discomforts in the way of noise and congestion that no other people in the world would tolerate. But they are extraordinarily simple and kind, hospitable to a degree, and very friendly. I was constantly stopped in the street by perfect strangers, and told how they had enjoyed seeing "The High Road."

Among the odd experiences I had in New York was one concerned with the arrival of the great trans-Atlantic Zeppelin from Germany. A night or two before its arrival, I was requested by the management of the theatre in which I was playing, to read a prayer from the stage after the First Act for the "safety of the Zeppelin and its intrepid crew." I felt very much inclined to preface this reading by saying,

"As an Englishman with a lively recollection of the last time he saw a Zeppelin—when it was dropping bombs a few yards away from him—I have been asked to offer up a prayer for the safety of the airship."

However, I did not; I read the prayer, and have

ever since felt rather ashamed of myself for doing so.

As a sight, the Zeppelin certainly was a magnificent spectacle, as it floated above Broadway and passed quite close to the roof of the Lotos Club where I was standing. But I found it difficult to adopt a sentimental attitude towards what, in England at all events, has never been considered a pleasant sight unless it was coming down in flames.

My wife has more occasion to remember this visit to America than I have, for she had a sudden operation for appendicitis while she was there, and followed this adventure by being shipwrecked on the *Celtic*, which ran on the rocks off Queenstown. She is now looked upon by my family in general as a kind of Robinson Crusoe. In spite of the horrors of the shipwreck, she says that in future she will travel by no other line than the White Star, because she is sure no other line could stage-manage a wreck as perfectly as they did. There was no panic of any kind, and the officers and crew behaved magnificently, with every consideration for the passengers.

Every Englishman visiting America is expected to express some opinion on the subject of Prohibition. My alcoholic requirements are very slight, and I was perfectly satisfied with some quite good Scotch whisky which I obtained without the slightest trouble, but at considerable expense, from a friendly bootlegger. The Americans are the best judges of what is good for them as a nation, but it does seem to me rather silly to have passed a law which is apparently quite impossible to enforce. I should fancy, too, that Prohibition is largely responsible for the crime wave of which we hear so much, for where the lower orders



see their betters busily engaged, from the time they get up in the morning to the time they go to bed at night, in breaking the law, how can the lower orders themselves be expected to show any respect for it? And how can Government employees, receiving a salary of thirty or forty dollars a week, be expected to turn up their noses at the hundred-dollar bills which are thrust upon them by the carriers of wine and spirits across the Canadian border? I can quite believe the world would be a better place without alcohol, but people who have been used to a certain amount all their lives can hardly be expected to give it up without a struggle. It seems to me that the more sensible way of treating the question would have been to make the penal enactments against drunkenness far severer than they actually are.

New York seems to go a little more mad than usual when a Presidential Election is in progress. The "talkie" was starting its raucous career, and in the middle of Broadway you saw the picture of a man waving his arms and making the most appalling noises, which apparently represented a speech he was then making in some other part of the United States. The personal popularity of Mr. Al Smith was expected to have a greater effect on the vote than it turned out to have, but I can't help thinking that the women's vote was more influenced by the charming and dignified appearance of Mrs. Hoover than by any political opinions, favourable or otherwise, that the ladies may have entertained.

Speaking of Mr. Hoover reminds me of one of my oldest American friends, who introduced me to the President some years ago. The friend I speak of was Melville Stone. He was one of the most interesting

characters the world possessed, knowing everybody of any importance in all countries. Beginning life as a Chicago pressman, he became the Editor of various influential newspapers, and attained the very important position of the Chief of the Associated Press. This position made him during the War one of the outstanding men of America, but he used his great powers with such tact and discernment that I do not believe he ever made an enemy. He died at an advanced age, to the intense grief of his numerous friends in every walk of life, and particularly of those in the Lotos Club, of which he had been one of the most popular and respected members.

I remember, a great many years ago, Stone became rather fidgety about his health, which he thought was being undermined by late hours spent at the Club. So he resigned his membership, to the great regret of everybody. Shortly after his resignation, a big dinner was given by the Club to some celebrity of the moment, and Stone was present as the guest of, I think, Hartley Manners, who, with me and one or two others, extracted a confession of regret on the part of Stone that he had left the Club. There was a quorum of the Election Committee in the room, and we then and there re-elected him—which drew from him the remark:

“This is the most difficult Club to get out of, and the easiest to get into, that I have ever known.”

Hartley Manners has also gone from us, another very popular member of the Lotos, and one of my oldest friends. I first knew him when he was a young actor and author, who came to America in a play he himself had written for Mrs. Langtry. He was nobody at all in those days, but became famous

as the author of "Peg o' my Heart" and many other plays in which his brilliant wife, Laurette Taylor, distinguished herself.

It is a curious coincidence that Mrs. Langtry should have died about the same time. It was through her that I first knew Hartley Manners, for I was called in by her to express my opinion on the dress rehearsal of his play.

A book of recollections seems largely occupied with a list of deaths. Another old friend of mine, Wallace Eddinger, passed away while I was in New York, and directly after I returned home the news came of the tragic end of his wife, Margaret Lawrence, who acted with me three or four years ago in "The Pelican." She was a delightful little actress and a very charming woman, who became more or less unbalanced in the last years of her life, and a chain of misfortunes and disappointments culminated in the termination of what had lately, I am afraid, been a very unhappy existence.

Here again I differ from the methods of the American Actors' Equity. This poor lady had committed a professional indiscretion which terminated her engagement at the time, the consequence of which would have made it difficult for her to obtain another engagement until she had proved her complete restoration to sanity and health. But the Actors' Equity steps in in a case like this, and places a ban on the delinquent, which makes it impossible for that actor or actress to obtain any work at all for some considerable period. It seems to me that managers are perfectly able to take care of themselves as to whom they engage, and that Actors' Equity methods are arbitrary, censorious and tyrannical, and in

this case, partly responsible for the blank despair which led to poor Margaret Lawrence's untimely end.

I have spoken a good deal of my old friend, John Drew. I was invited to a service at the Little-Church-round-the-Corner, at which a window to his memory was presented by his daughter, and consecrated; it seemed like a gathering of the clans of long ago. The service itself was very touching and sincere, and a great tribute to Drew. Very good addresses were delivered by Dan Frohman and others, extolling John's many claims to the affection of America, but despite the fact that the ceremony was held in a church, I felt very much inclined to get up and say, as one of his oldest friends, that while all these encomiums were true and well deserved, his chief virtue in my opinion was his camaraderie. He was a prince of good fellows.

During my stay in New York I went one evening to a Lambs' Gambol. It was a very jolly evening that reminded me of the old times, although most of the performers were new to me. Indeed, I fancy that with the exception of my old friend de Wolf Hopper, I was the oldest man in the room. The Lambs is an institution which does not alter with the years, although Prohibition has taken toll of many of its special characteristics.

After a goodish run in New York, we went for a couple of months or so on a tour which included Boston, Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago. I found all these cities altered, but not to the same extent as New York. Boston still remains the city where an Englishman feels at home, although unhappily it no longer seems to be a very good theatrical town. In this respect it has changed places with Philadelphia.

Washington is distinctly duller than it used to be, and Chicago remains about the same.

The hotels have increased in luxury and decreased in comfort. Prohibition, I take it, was the reason for my being constantly disturbed by drunken parties in the next room to mine, as occurred in both Philadelphia and Washington. It seems impossible for a large section of the American public to take a drink and leave it at that; the bottle has to be finished, and you may see more drunken people in any one evening at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Philadelphia, than you will in a month at the Ritz and the Carlton Hotels put together in London.

Another tribute to Prohibition!

Whatever the future may have in store for Great Britain and America, it is absolutely certain that, in spite of occasional friction, they will have to walk hand in hand, and though America has a very cosmopolitan population, the better and more influential classes have always seemed to me to have a very great affection for the Old Country from which most of them sprang. This was exemplified in a striking manner during the King's recent illness. The better-class American newspapers were just as anxious and sympathetic as any English newspapers could have been, and the bulletins about his progress were looked for with the keenest interest. I remember that the same exhibition of good feeling was manifested during King Edward's illness, which also occurred while I was on an American visit, the unhappy outcome of which our present King has been mercifully spared. When King Edward died I was in Buffalo, and went to a very impressive memorial service at one of the Buffalo churches.

The British King has always been, and I think always will be, a very great figurehead in the United States.

I have nothing more to say about myself or my family. A book of recollections is not in any sense of the word an autobiography; nor am I vain enough to suppose that my personal history can be of the slightest interest to anyone but myself. So I will conclude by expressing the fervent hope that my readers will not be feeling a sense of wonderment at my rejection of my original title—"Reminiscences."



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